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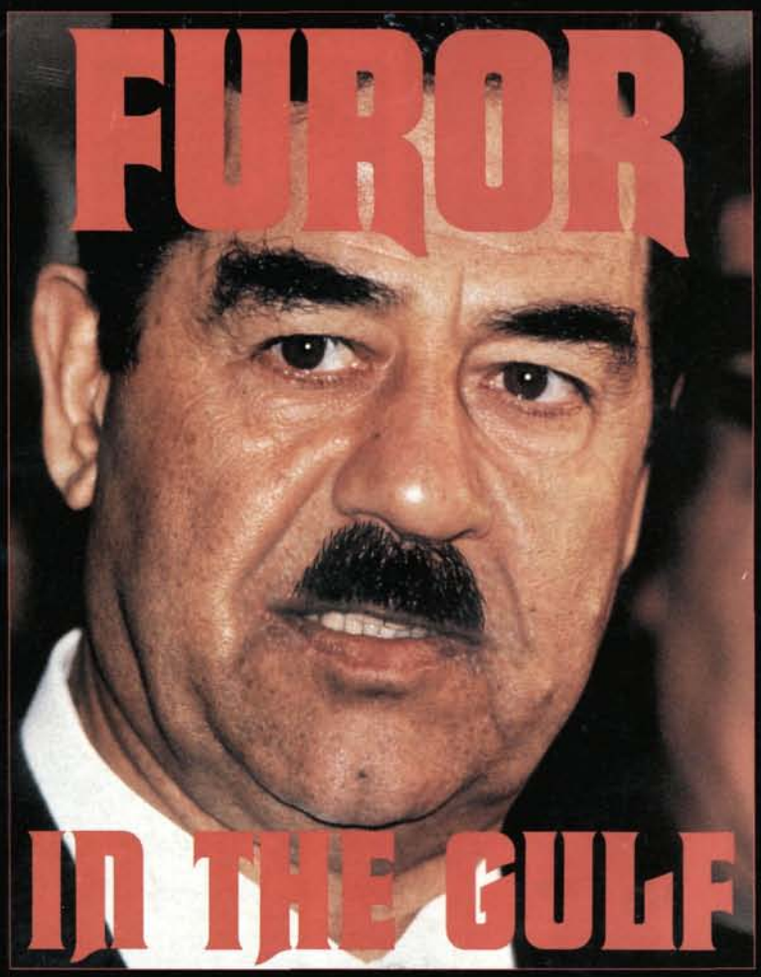

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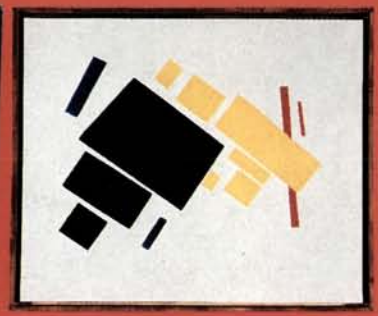
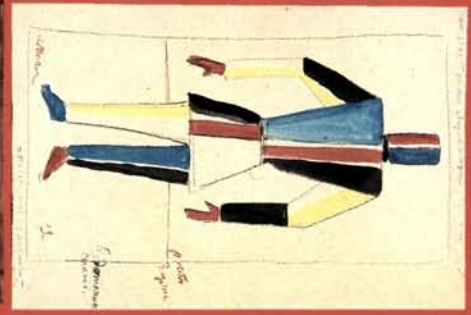

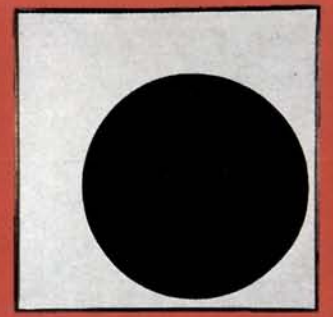

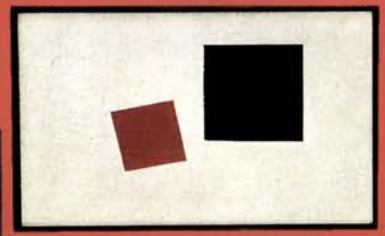

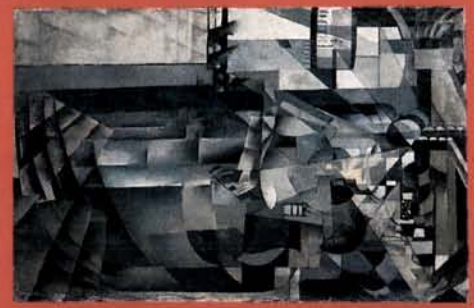

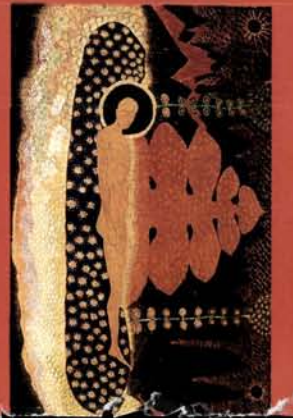

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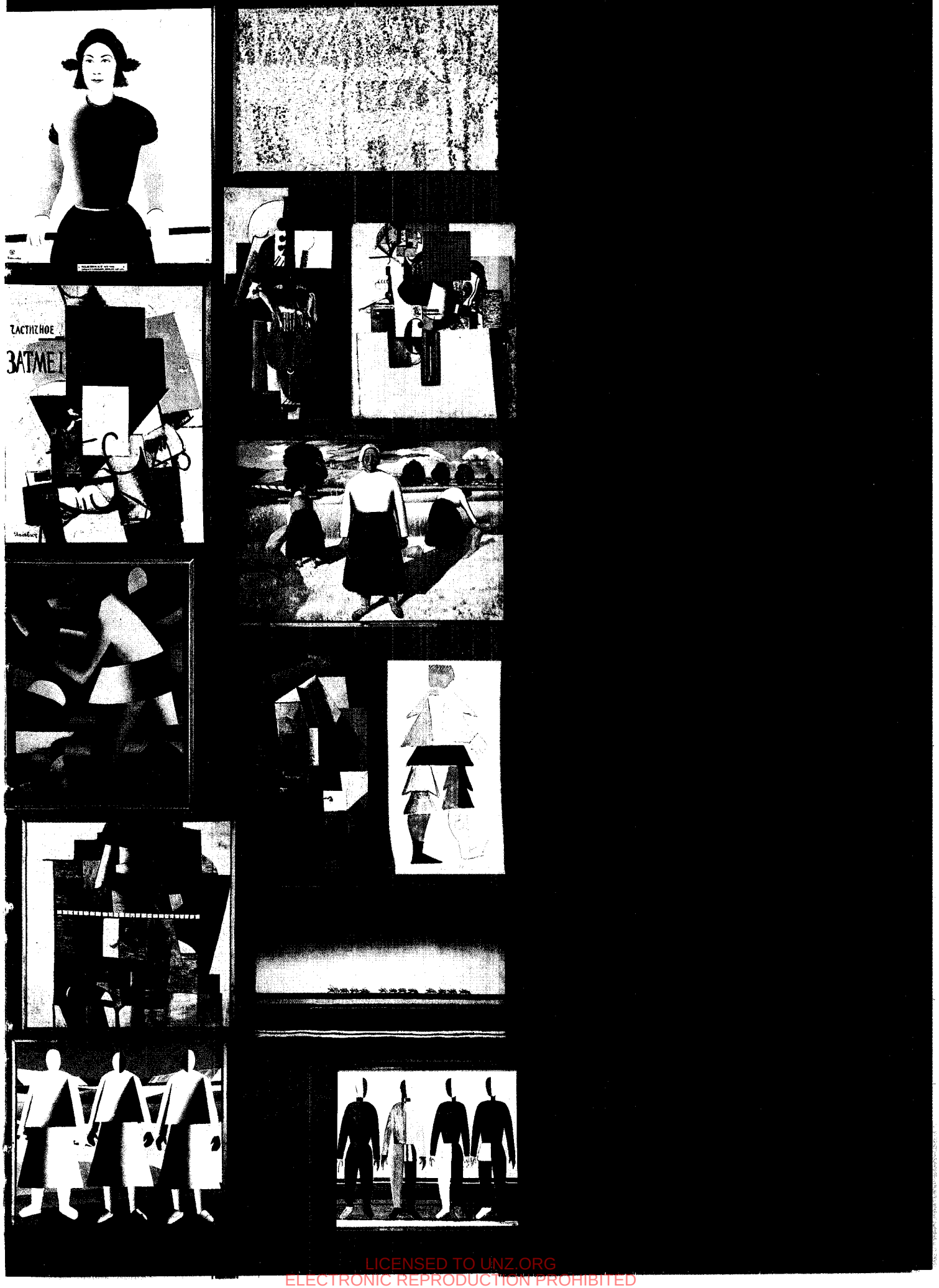

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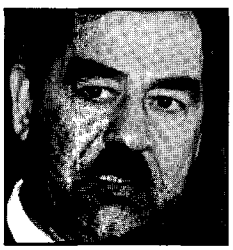

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Trial by jury

My friend the hotshot criminal lawyer is tired of hearing me say that I'll call her whenever I'm in legal trouble—if I'm guilty. Otherwise, I'll find someone cheaper. A great lawyer is not someone who can get an innocent person off. A great lawyer is someone who can get a guilty person off.

Kenneth Mundy, who represented Washington Mayor Marion Barry in his drug and perjury trial, is a great lawyer. But what does it say about a legal system when a person videotaped using crack can't be convicted for it? Or, if that is too tendentious a question, what does it say about a legal system that a trial can last two months, the jury can spend eight days deliberating, and then it can be unable to produce a verdict on all the major counts? Surely that is absurd whatever you think about the Barry case.

In the aftermath of the Barry trial, there's been a lot of brooding about race. Better, perhaps, to brood about the justice system—"how weird and zany what we do is, compared to everyone else," as Professor John Langbein of Yale Law School puts it. No other advanced country would have a circus like the Barry trial with, in effect, no result. To be sure, other systems have their defects, too. There have been appalling revelations recently about miscarriages of justice for suspected Irish terrorists in Britain. Continental European systems reflect a deference to government authority that is not our style, to say the least. But there is still a thing or two to be learned from the comparison.

In Britain they do not allow what they call "jury vetting" and what we therefore give a French name: *voir dire*. This is the elaborate process in which the lawyers get to pick and choose among jurors, which can sometimes take days. Mundy, Barry's lawyer, obviously wanted lots of blacks on the jury, but he also allowed a few whites on the panel. This surprised some people, but his strategy apparently was to hope that a bit of racial tension would get somebody's back up. Judging from jurors' comments after the trial, it seems to have worked. In Britain this whole level of strategizing doesn't exist.

Jury vetting also tends to produce jurors less disciplined about applying legal doctrines to the facts and suppressing their own prejudices. As Geoffrey Robertson, a British barrister, puts it: "By the time you've winnowed out jurors with any opinion about anything, you get a jury that's fairly malleable and lacks the strength of character one relies on."

A second difference in Britain is that judges are allowed to give the jurors more guidance. They comment on the merits of the case, the weight of the evidence, the persuasiveness of the witnesses. In America this kind of "prejudicing" the jury is actually forbidden by many state constitutions, and federal judges have barely more latitude. British juries can ignore the judge's advice, of course. But they are less likely to produce a result totally at odds with the evidence and the law—and more likely to produce a result, period.

France and Germany go even further and use panels combining professional jurists and lay people. These panels are obligated to produce more than just a thumbs-up or thumbs-down ruling. They have to offer their reasoning. This also minimizes the chance of what is called "jury nullification"—meaning juries that ignore the law and do what they please.

Britain also allows verdicts of 10-2. Judges are supposed to push for unanimity, but may allow a majority verdict if the jury is stuck. Langbein of Yale insists this makes little difference in the result. "It's not like in that Henry Fonda movie. If there's one holdout, he'll cave." But not requiring unanimity undeniably speeds things up. British lawyers say an eight-day jury sequester would be almost unimaginable over there. The non-unanimous jury was a British reform of the 1960s. Ironically, the U.S. Constitution commits us to the jury system as it existed in Britain in 1789.

The absurdities of the American system are not limited to those favoring the defendant. A couple of British lawyers expressed amazement at the fourteen-count indictment in the Barry case: a recipe, they think, for delay and confusion. In general, they are bemused by America's grandstanding prosecutors. As viewers of "Rumpole of the Bailey" are aware, in Britain the same barristers take turns defending and prosecuting cases.

This brings us to the infamous Vista Hotel setup of Barry. The art of the "sting" is more highly developed in America than elsewhere. I'm of two minds. On the one hand, it might not bother me if every elected official in America knew there was a government office permanently dedicated to entrapping him or her in some dereliction of duty—the political equivalent of an unmarked police car. On the other hand, I was sobered by Norval Morris, a New Zealander now teaching at the University of Chicago Law School, who said: "In a world where many people have their price, I don't want the government going around testing the price of everyone."

Any trial reforms that made it easier to convict guilty people would also, of course, make it easier to convict innocent people. Is this a serious danger? No, because hardly anybody gets a trial. As Langbein points out, the trial procedures that give every defendant, guilty or innocent, a shot at getting off don't exist in the 99 percent of all felony cases (and virtually 100 percent of all misdemeanors) settled by plea bargains. "You can find a hippopotamus in Washington—in the zoo—but they're not a part of the daily life of the city. The same is true of jury trials." A defendant who refuses to plea bargain pays double if convicted: once for his crime and once for asserting his rights. But it is simply impossible to offer a Barry-style trial to every defendant. Systems that offer a more streamlined trial to all comers actually provide better justice.

Trial procedure is a more worthy area for reform than the Court-created Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Amendment rights that have obsessed conservatives for so long. But liberals also need to develop a renewed appreciation of the need for expeditiously convicting the guilty. The Marion Barrys and Oliver Norths get the Kenneth Mundys and Brendon Sullivans. The deck is rarely shuffled so that the "Get Out of Jail Free" card comes up for the ordinary defendant. Furthermore, more efficient justice is the best answer to the lock-'em-up fever sweeping the country. American prison sentences are already too long, and jails are hopelessly overcrowded. If punishment were swifter and surer, it wouldn't have to be so severe in order to satisfy both the needs of deterrence and the community's demands for vengeance.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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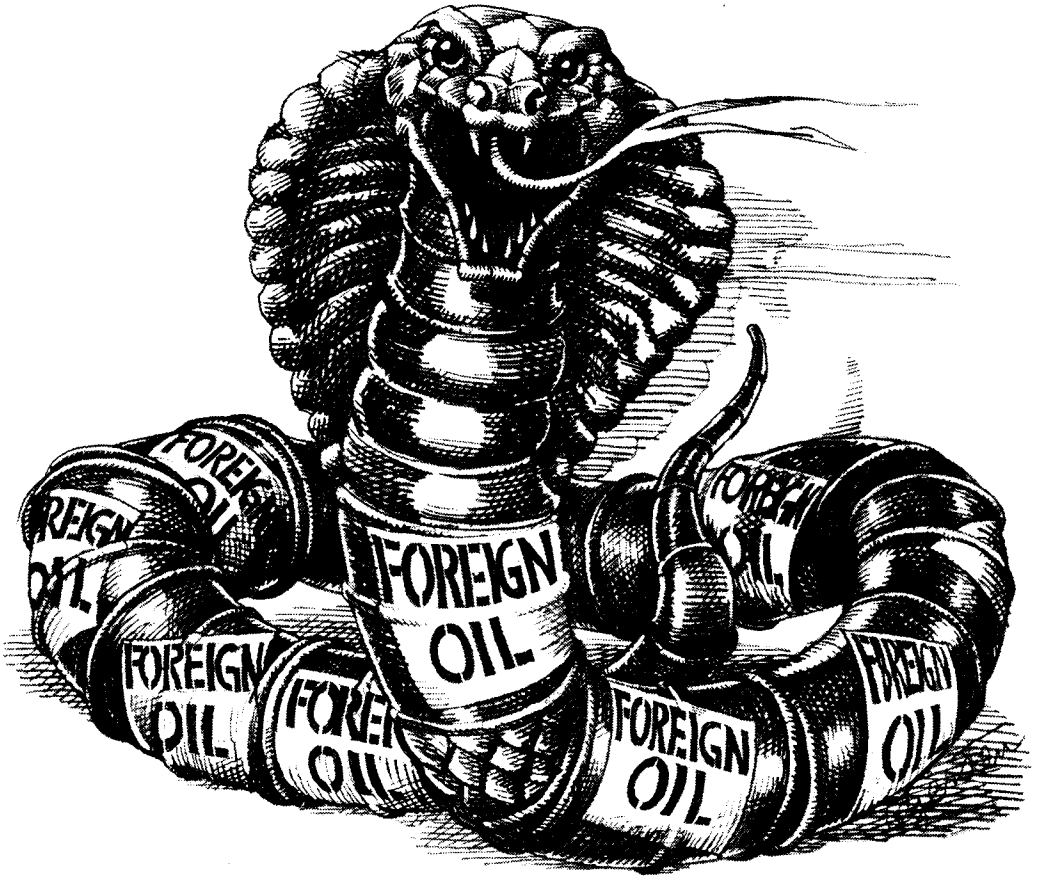

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CORRESPONDENCE

Charmed, I'm sure

To the editors:

Sidney Blumenthal's rhapsodic paean to Dianne Feinstein ("A Woman of Independent Means," August 13) managed, like the former mayor herself, to avoid any substantive discussion of her abilities as a leader. The alleged star quality certain pundits think they see in her is part of the reality-avoidance syndrome present in American politics from Camelot to Hollywood.

Feinstein the politician is, in actuality, "beiger" than Blumenthal paints her Republican opponent, Senator Pete Wilson. Her mayorship was successful in getting San Francisco through the painful moments of the Moscone-Milk assassinations, but beyond that her record was plodding, lackluster, and devoid of anything remotely glamorous. By the end of her tenure, San Franciscans were so weary of Feinstein that her heir apparent was trounced in the race to succeed her.

Clearly the Feinstein image-makers need to convince voters that, this colorless record notwithstanding, "charisma" can overcome a demonstrated lack of ability to manage government and inspire progress. The trick, of course, has been done before in American politics; the question is, how cynical are California voters feeling this pivotal election year?

MARTIN KELLER
San Francisco, California

Clean genes

To the editors:

In "Achilles' Helix" (July 9 & 16), Robert Wright suggests that some opponents of the human genome project were bought off by making it possible for them to tap into genome funds. Although one can't eliminate the possibility that some backers of the initiative were "bought" in some manner, using David Botstein as an example of those geneticists who "warmed up to the project once it was broadened to include their work" is extremely unfair.

While I was training as a postdoctoral fellow with Botstein at MIT from 1985 through 1988 I discussed the genome initiative with him often and observed his activities with respect to the project. His first concern was to protect young scientists from having their research funds sucked up by the initiative. Botstein only backed the initiative once he was assured that this would not be the case. Moreover, he did not back the early version of the project because he questioned its scientific methods.

Botstein's efforts have resulted in making an ill-conceived project useful and practical. Most important, he was from the start the most vocal opponent of determining all of the "letters" that constitute the human genome using current technology, an endeavor I believe the vast majority of biologists would oppose. Instead, he advocated creating a map that would facilitate the finding of the "addresses" for the genes that are defective in such diseases as muscular dystrophy and cystic fibrosis. Thanks to his efforts, the emphasis of the project has been steered toward this more efficient and informative process.

Wright failed to acknowledge that it was Botstein who, together with Ray White and Ron Davis, laid the theoretical foundation for the mapping of genes in the human genome. The ability to locate defective genes for various human diseases provides not only the basis for diagnosis (as Wright pointed out), but more important, provides the basis for understanding the cause of a disease. As this information is crucial for the development of treatments and preventive measures, it can be reasonably argued that the ability to map human genes is the most important single advance for human health in decades.

DAVID G. DRUBIN
Berkeley, California

The writer is assistant professor of cell biology at the University of California, Berkeley.

To the editors:

In "The End of Insurance (July 9 & 16)," Robert Wright has pinpointed an issue that is as relevant to drug testing as it is to genetic screening. If an employer can search for illegal drugs in an employee's urine or hair, then that employer can also detect the presence of prescription drugs. Following the same logic in Wright's piece, one can predict that sooner or later employers will routinely search their employees (and applicants) for evidence of prescribed medications, simply because they will prefer an employee pool that brings them lower medical and insurance costs. It seems likely that insurance companies will, in turn, pressure employers with group programs either to test their employees or pay higher premiums.

One could then expect people to turn down certain therapies (for example, anti-epileptic, anti-arrhythmic, and antidepressant drugs) that could put their employment at risk. The choice could be your job or your health.

If the current perceived need for drug testing suddenly disappeared, drug testing labs would probably not fold up shop; they would seek new applications for the profitable technology they have developed. I expect they will do this anyway to diversify.

RONALD A. SIEGEL
San Francisco, California

Penny anti

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley's essay on the costs of abandoning the penny and creating a new dollar coin was very interesting, as far as it went ("Fear of Change," TRB, July 30 & August 6). However, he completely ignored the pocket deterioration factor (PDF).

Research is needed to determine the additional cost to the citizens of premature failure of pants pockets due to the added burden of carrying the weighty dollar coins. What about the lost coins? Will trouser factories in Singapore, Haiti, and Sri Lanka have to be retooled to cope with the problem? If my own experience is typical, sales of duct tape will soar in the near term, as exhausted Americans will be unable to keep up with the repairs.

Perhaps Kinsley could use his considerable influence in Washington to inspire a congressional committee to take up the PDF problem. Having Congress investigate would have two obvious benefits: (1) It would make jobs for hundreds of staffers as we go into a downturn in employment, and (2) It would keep Congress from making mischief in other fields, such as taxation or civil rights quotas.

STEVE SCHNEIDER
Berkeley, California

Politics of desire

To the editors:

In his excellent, if bloodcurdling, article on Romania ("Bloody Romania," July 30 & August 6), Robert D. Kaplan gives King Carol's mistress the first name of "Elena." Those of us whose highly flammable adolescent imaginations were further inflamed in the 1930s by the voluptuous redheaded concubine remember the limerick that immortalized her under the name "Magda," which she was referred to, according to Hannah Pakula, biographer of Romania's Queen Marie, "due to the error of an Italian journalist who mistook her for someone else":

Said beautiful Magda Lupescu,
Who had come to Romania's rescue,
"It's a wonderful thing
To be under a King.
Is democracy better, I ask you?"

ROBERT A. RIESMAN
Providence, Rhode Island

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

SEPTEMBER 3, 1990

THE GUNS OF AUGUST

In a way Saddam Hussein did the world a favor by invading Kuwait and menacing Saudi Arabia. He reminded everyone that the demise of the cold war did not bring an end to aggression and the need for the civilized nations to resist it. It is well that this lesson is being taught at the very outset of the debate over what sort of defense establishment is required in the new world created by the death of communism. Hussein has presented almost a model threat around which to organize the post-cold war world security structure. Having long ago established himself as a brutal despot, he nakedly invaded and annexed a neighboring country, and brazenly defied near-unanimous international demands that he withdraw. And he put his forces within striking distance of one of the world's most critical resources, Saudi Arabia's oil fields, making it necessary for the United States and other nations to act to counter him, instead of just issuing protest statements.

We were surprised, frankly, by George Bush's effectiveness in rousing the world community and, even more so, in the world's swift agreement to penalize Hussein. The Bush administration woefully misjudged Hussein up to the moment of the invasion of Kuwait; indeed, just two days before, one very high-ranking official told a member of THE NEW REPUBLIC's staff that he regarded Iraq as no greater a threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East than Iran (defeated in war) or the Soviet Union (out of the aggression game). Bush's initial reaction to the invasion was to say, "We're not contemplating military action." Apparently it took a lecture from Margaret Thatcher to set him planning to send in forces to protect Saudi Arabia. (See "Hour of Power" by Fred Barnes, page 12.)

Bush did, however, put together what could be a model multinational strategy for resisting this sort of aggression in the future. He organized or helped organize overwhelming condemnation and sanctions votes in the United Nations; an arms embargo joined by Iraq's major weapons supplier, the Soviet Union, and by China; an economic embargo joined by Iraq's oil customers, including Japan; a U.S.-led naval blockade to enforce the embargo; increased output by other oil producers to make up much of the Iraqi-Kuwaiti shortfall; an unprecedented (albeit reluctant) invitation from Saudi Arabia to position U.S. forces on its soil; agreement by Turkey (a NATO member) to allow its bases to be used for a non-European defense mission; the dispatch of tens of thousands of U.S. troops, dozens of ships, and hundreds of planes to the area, joined by ground and air forces from Britain and ships from several other nations; and the participation of several Arab League nations, led by Egypt, in the Saudi defense effort.

This package resembles what has been regularly recommended in this space: the exercise of leadership by the United States and other industrialized democracies to use existing institutions or invent new ones to deal with the serious security problems of the post-cold war era. Hussein embodies many of those problems: aggression, terrorism, virulent tribalism, and missile, nuclear, and chemical weapons proliferation. The idea we've had in mind is that non-industrialized non-democracies would have a standing invitation to join us in keeping the peace, widening the in-group, and helping spread adherence to democratic politics and market economics. (See "Pax Kapital," TNR, July 30 & August 6.)

So we're pleased to see many non-democracies joining the effort to isolate Hussein, and pleased to see the United States retaining decisive leadership of it. When the Soviet Union (also France, Canada, and Malaysia) complained that the U.N. had not authorized a naval blockade of Iraq, the United States went ahead with it anyway. We'd have preferred it if Bush had maneuvered the U.N. into asking for a blockade, but too many countries cynically prefer to have the blockade without the blame. U.N. or no U.N., almost all of Iraq's supply lines have been cut; and the United States has served

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notice on the quavering king of Jordan that if he does not close the port of Aqaba our ships will close it for him.

So far, so good. The problem is that though Bush's strategy may serve to deal with most aggressors in this new era we're entering, it may not be adequate to eliminate the long-term Iraqi threat. Officially, U.S. troops and planes are on hand merely to defend Saudi Arabia, not to attack Iraq. Bush intends that the world economic embargo, enforced by his naval blockade, will starve Saddam Hussein into pulling his troops out of Kuwait and restoring the ousted pro-Western regime. Bush also hopes that disgrace and defeat—on top of hardship, isolation, and resentments accumulated during his brutal rule and his war with Iran—will bring about the downfall of Hussein. According to an August 6 leak in *The Washington Post* that was perfunctorily denied by the White House, Bush ordered the planning of a covert program to topple Hussein from power. We trust that was not just psychological warfare designed to rattle a paranoid.

The fact is, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, the Arab world, and the international economy will not be safe as long as Hussein rules Iraq. Nor will the world be safe as long as Iraq, with or without Hussein, has the kind of military arsenal that he has built up. Whoever rules Iraq commands a million-man army with the biggest tank force in the region; the fastest-growing chemical weapons industry in the world; a $1 billion ballistic missile program; and a nuclear program believed to be only five years away from producing the bomb. Iraq has huge debts, but also the world's second-largest oil reserves. An Iraq in possession of missiles and nuclear weapons, with a political culture that's known only plotting and war, is a permanent menace to its environment.

The danger, then, goes beyond the person of Saddam Hussein; and according to more than one scenario, Hussein could survive or even prevail. If there's a military stalemate lasting into winter, oil consumers may get tired of paying inflated prices for fuel and start calling for a face-saving deal. If Hussein agreed to pull out of Kuwait and the United States went home, he'd still be in position to dominate the region, build up his nuclear arsenal, and plot to win his way another day.

In another scenario, if it looked as though the world's resolve were holding, Hussein could try to break it by using terrorism or his plentiful supply of foreign hostages to force one nation after another to back out of the consortium now facing him. Could George Bush stand up to a hostage crisis better than Jimmy Carter or Ronald Reagan did? Could Toshiki Kaifu of Japan or Hosni Mubarak of Egypt? Not likely. Already there are voices in the U.S. press claiming that the only principle the United States is defending is the right to buy inexpensive gasoline. That theme will become thunderous if Hussein begins threatening innocent lives, as he's all too capable of doing. Suppose he offers this deal: he will pull out of Kuwait, all hostages will go home, and the embargo against him will be lifted. Of course, he will be allowed to keep all of the colossal billions he has already stolen, and the Arab oil monarchs, to get him of their backs for the moment, will agree. This would be a Sudetenland settlement; and it might be precisely the kind of deal King Hussein is bringing with him to President Bush. The world might well clamor for the bargain, even though the Iraqi menace would remain.

There are two possible solutions to this dilemma. One is to massively bomb Hussein's military machine now and put it out of commission: his nuclear facilities, chemical plants, missile installations, weapons manufacturing factories, tanks, and air force. This probably can't be done without provocation; but there are plenty of those around. At the slightest provocation—such as a terrorist attack or a move to use interned foreigners as hostages—the United States could launch an attack and explain afterward why it was necessary. There would be howls of protest worldwide, but also sighs of relief if it were successful.

The other alternative is a long-term, large-scale American military presence in the Persian Gulf to protect the oil and counter potential hostile powers such as Iraq and Iran. In effect, the United States would cut back its NATO commitment and transfer it to the Gulf. Ideally, we would be joined (as we are in NATO) by other nations, including Arabs, and have our services paid for by Japan, the European Community, other oil consumers, and the Gulf states we were protecting. Ideally, forces would be spread out—not just in Saudi Arabia, where they'd be subject to local political pressures to leave, but elsewhere in the Gulf, in Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and even Jordan, Iran, and Syria.

The problem with this second alternative is that neither the United States nor the Arabs are likely to support it for long. Americans will not like the expense, which could rival that of NATO. Arab rulers will not want to be accused from the left of being lackeys of the United States, and from the right of allowing Islamic culture to be poisoned by vices brought in by American soldiers. Japan and the EC probably wouldn't pay for what inevitably would be characterized as an American "occupation." So we conclude that the only effective way to counter Iraq's military threat is to destroy it—and the sooner the better.

We anticipate that the Bush administration won't bite this bullet, will try instead to keep a large expeditionary force in the Gulf, and will shortly turn the pressure back on Israel for a settlement of the Palestinian question. With help from American television networks, Saddam Hussein, King Hussein, and various Palestinian spokesmen are trying to link Iraqi aggression to Palestinian frustration, implying that the one can't be solved without the other. It's nonsense. Iraq would be using its tanks and missiles to dominate its neighbors even if Israel did not exist. But the Iraq crisis should tell the Bush administration something about who its friends are in the region. When the time came to choose, PLO chief Yasir Arafat was on the side of the anti-Western

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militarist dictator, Saddam Hussein; and so, at this writing, is King Hussein. If there's ever to be a Palestinian settlement, it will have to be with people truly willing to live at peace with Israel and courageous enough to stand up to radicals. Is it any wonder the Israelis are more skeptical than ever of allowing any Arab state to have sovereignty over the West Bank?

Normally, exercises of American military power are opposed by the left, but in this case, the loudest criticism is coming from the right—notably from columnists Evans and Novak and Patrick Buchanan and cuckoo congressman Robert Dornan of California, who claim that the United States is siding with rich, decadent, undemocratic oligarchs and is opposing the will of the Arab masses. This is an argument usually heard from Jesse Jackson, who's now supporting Desert Shield: that the United States is on the wrong side of history. And it's as mistaken in the Mideast as it was in Latin America. The proof lies in Mubarak's participation with us, apparently with popular backing in Egypt. Saddam Hussein is rousing the rabble toward war. It's not just oil we are protecting, but a potential future for the Arabs.

It ought to be obvious that building a post-cold war security structure can only be done with American leadership, much as fighting and winning the cold war could only have been done with American resolve. And leadership requires military prowess as well as an uplifting spirit. The military budget should be cut from cold war levels, but not so much as hoped for by those who have focused only on the diminished Soviet threat. Not enough planning has been done for handling the likes of Hussein, the regional dictator with nuclear ambitions. With luck, courage, leadership, and determination, the world ultimately may be rid of him. But rest assured. History is not ended. Another Saddam will be along.

NOTEBOOK

DISABLED WEAPONS: Iraqi diplomats would seem to be in a poor position to vent moral outrage at other nations, but that has not deterred Dr. Mohamed Sadiq Al-Mashat from pronouncing upon America's barbarism and cruelty. In a press release issued a few days before Saddam Hussein turned Kuwait into South Iraq, Baghdad's man in Washington attacked the Customs Service's decision to ban the export of so-called "skull furnaces," offering a sermonette on the kindness of strangers: "Iraq needs these furnaces to purify, melt, and cast metals to be used in producing artificial limbs for the thousands of unfortunate people who lost limbs during the eight-year war with Iran and finds it most inhumane to prevent or delay the acquisition of equipment that will be used for their benefit. The Government of Iraq cannot stress enough how urgent the need is among its physically handicapped, to whom artificial limbs will spell the difference between hopeless existence and a happy productive life." Most inhumane? Another popular use of such industrial furnaces is to produce nose cones for missiles, which deliver chemical weapons. It might be remembered that Iraq rained such weapons upon Iran during the eight-year war that Iraq started, and that cost each country half a million lives. No one has ever accused Hussein of being short on nerve, or nerve gas.

I SPY: The McCarran-Walter Act, which permitted the exclusion from the United States of politically suspect visitors, was curtailed by the Senate last year, but America's immigration rules remain firmly rooted in the 1950s. Kathryn Paley, an Australian schoolteacher married to an American, discovered this recently when she applied for a resident visa. Paley received a call from the U.S. consulate in Sydney, which wished to follow up her "admission" that she belonged to the New South Wales Teachers Federation. She acknowledged that she did, and received her visa in due course. But on passing through immigration in the United States, Paley's attention was drawn to an "i" stamped on her passport, which, she was informed, stood for "involuntary communist." It turns out that the State Department classifies her union as a "Communist affiliated organization," but that her membership in it was ruled "involuntary" since she joined "solely for the purpose of obtaining employment." This is absurd at all levels. According to the Australian Council of Trade Unions, the New South Wales Teachers Federation is a legally registered branch of the Australian Teachers Federation, which is not affiliated with the Communist Party, or any other, and has members of various political persuasions. But even if it were a Communist-affiliated organization, what danger would its members pose to the American shoreline? The State Department's "i" seems especially laughable at a time when "involuntary communists" are about the only kind left.

REFLEX RESPONSE: In an article about the Central Park jogger trial in the July 17 issue of *The Village Voice*, Erika Munk came close to actually criticizing the Al Sharpton-led mob that gathers in front of the courthouse to allege a frame-up of the defendants. But no, it turns out that their paranoia is only a response to white racism. "Such extreme defensiveness is only comprehensible as a result of a long history of police bias, combined with a reaction against the white media's treatment of the crime. . . . Sharpton is being manipulative, but the guys in front of the courthouse were being, manipulatedly, loyal. If white racism hadn't shaped the coverage a year ago, this wouldn't be happening." Wait a minute. Granting for the sake of argument that the "white media's" coverage of the near-murder was racist (which Munk doesn't bother to demonstrate), why does that excuse a mob that parrots the fabrication that "the boyfriend did it"? It's a shame that the *Voice* still can't find its way to pointing out misbehavior by blacks without passing ultimate blame to whitey.

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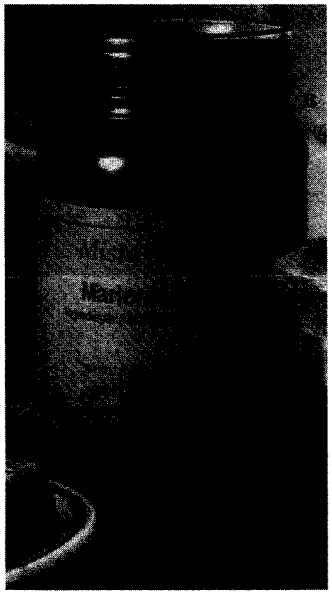
UH OH, NOW THE MAYOR'S REALLY IN A JAM:



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UH OH, NO HE ISN'T: One of the institutions that has benefited from the verdict in the cocaine-and-perjury trial of the mayor of Washington is the Democratic Party, from which Marion Barry has now resigned so as to run for the city council as an independent. The party's gain will be the council's loss: election to an at-large seat does not require a majority, so Barry will probably win. Barry gave a speech to his supporters the Sunday after the verdict. Its mixture of bathos, self-pity, and media-bashing proved conclusively that Marion Barry has become the black Nixon. The difference is that Barry is pardoning himself. He asked forgiveness for any "hurt" he "may have" caused and explained, "I realized that I had spent so much time trying to do so much for many of you I had ignored major parts of myself." (So *that* was the problem.) Barry has mastered a debased version of the language of human potential, as in this gem: "I'm hoping that any of you who still harbor resentments and vengeance can let go. Let go of the past. Let go of the past." Let go of our leg, Mr. Mayor.

CARROT MUFFIN'S REVENGE: Bloodroot, a feminist vegetarian restaurant in Bridgeport, Connecticut, posts this handwritten sign on the wall next to the chalkboard menu: "Because all women are victims of fat oppression and out of respect for women of size, we would appreciate your refraining from agonizing aloud over the calorie count in our food." Partners in the collective say the message has helped relieve the guilt of the women who frequent Bloodroot. It also hasn't hurt sales of peach cobblers, blueberry peach sundaes, and lemon-lime tofu mousses (with almond creme topping). Why not have two desserts? It's society's fault anyway. •

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

HOUR OF POWER

By Fred Barnes

The finest moment of George Bush's presidency began with a stumble, not a bold step. Hours after Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, Bush assembled the National Security Council in the Cabinet Room for an 8 a.m. meeting. A press pool was invited in for a few minutes of Q&A. "We're not discussing intervention," Bush said flatly. Reporters were surprised at his blunt closeout of this option, but Bush insisted. "We're not contemplating such action, and I . . . would not discuss it if we were." Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater watched this episode on CNN in his hometown of Abilene, Kansas, where he was visiting his father. He immediately called the White House. The president blew it, Fitzwater said. Bush had seemed to rule out intervention entirely. Fitzwater knew he hadn't meant to do that. (What Bush had tried to convey was only that intervention was not being discussed at that particular NSC meeting.) Fitzwater said Bush needed to correct his mistake. Hours later in Aspen, Colorado, with British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at his side, he did. "We're not ruling any options out," he said.

That was Bush's only misstep in an otherwise dazzling performance. In roughly four days, Bush organized the world against the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein. He did it almost single-handedly (Thatcher helped). I can't think of another president who could have pulled this off. Reagan knew how to lead, but only in a general direction. Carter organized Egypt and Israel at Camp David, but that was mere chamber music compared with Bush's improvised symphony. The closest parallels are with Truman—first when he pulled Europe together with the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, and later when he brought the United Nations into Korea. But it was easier for the United States to throw its weight around in that era. Now American clout in the world is in relative decline.

You'd never have guessed that from the way Bush operated. With Germany reunifying, Chancellor Helmut Kohl is supposed to be the new colossus of the West. He wasn't a player this time, even peripherally. Bush called him once, as Kohl vacationed at a fat farm. It's also been fashionable to sneer at Bush's relentless emphasis on fostering chummy relationships with world leaders. Bush was vindicated, especially when he got his buddy in Japan, Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, to sign on swiftly to a full economic embargo of Iraq. And Bush made the most of the "special relationship" between the White

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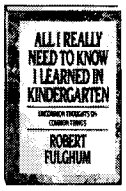

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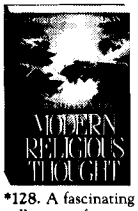

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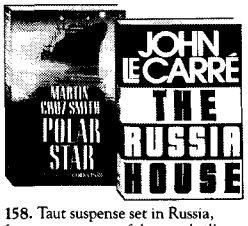

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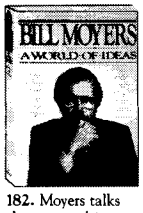

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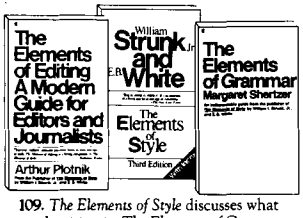

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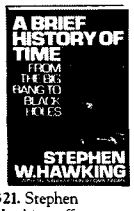

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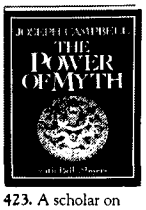

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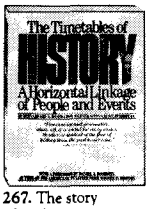

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House and Thatcher, a relationship that British reporters have delighted in declaring dead, a relic of the 1980s.

Thatcher's influence was critical. Both she and Bush were scheduled to give speeches at an Aspen Institute symposium on August 2, but the real reason he went was to consult with her. "Thatcher was one of the people he wanted to talk to," says a senior aide. Until recent months, Bush and Thatcher hadn't been particularly close. Thatcher missed the warm personal friendship and deep ideological ties she had with Reagan. "In a way, she became the spokesman for the two of them," says a Bush adviser. "Bush is a different kind of guy." He disagreed with her hesitancy about German reunification and her truculence about European economic unity. But when they met one-on-one in Bermuda last April, a kinship took hold. After talking to her in Aspen, Bush sounded tougher and more confident, his spine stiffened. "Prime Minister Thatcher and I are looking at it on exactly the same wavelength," he said.

In their talk, Thatcher laid out precisely what Bush decided for himself the next day. "She was a big influence on the basic decision he had to make: What are the U.S. and Western interests in the Gulf, are they long-term or short-term, and are they worth defending?" said a Bush aide who attended their meeting. She told Bush their interests were towering, long-term, and must be aggressively defended. At a National Security Council meeting on August 3, Bush officially agreed. Iraq must be stopped. This ended a months-long debate inside the administration over how to handle Saddam Hussein. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser, had thought he could be dealt with through non-punitive means. They were wrong.

Having decided to intervene, Bush needed five key countries on board: the Soviet Union, Japan, China, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. The Soviets turned out to be surprisingly easy. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, Secretary of State James Baker was meeting in Siberia with his Soviet counterpart, Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. The Soviets quickly agreed to cut off arms to Iraq and condemn the invasion, and Baker called Bush shortly after 7 a.m. on August 2 to inform him. This allowed Bush, at the first NSC meeting, to say, "I've been pleased with the Soviet reaction."

Japan was tougher. The Japanese get 99 percent of their oil from overseas and a sizable chunk of it from Iraq and Kuwait. Bush called Kaifu on the night of August 3 (it was the next morning in Japan). "Our suspicion was the Japanese would be reluctant," said a Bush aide. Kaifu said he wanted to be supportive but was fuzzy on how. On August 5, Sunday morning, he called Bush at Camp David and promised to support the full embargo. Bush was euphoric; his courtship of Kaifu, beginning last February in Palm Springs when Kaifu wasn't expected to last long as prime minister, had paid off. "Kaifu has a great sense of obligation to Bush," says a White House official who's taken part in all the Bush-Kaifu talks. "He gives the president a lot of credit in moving his general rating from 15 percent to the highest of any prime minister. Also, Kaifu wants to get into a global relationship with the U.S. and be a player in the world. This gave him an opportunity."

China required more delicacy. Bush learned the hard way that the Chinese don't like to do business over the phone. He rang Deng Xiaoping last year after the Tiananmen Square massacre, only to have Deng refuse to take the call. This time Ambassador James Lilley was instructed to tell Chinese leaders in Beijing, in person, that boycotting Iraq was of paramount importance to the United States. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Solomon, briefed by Scowcroft, flew to China with the same message. The Chinese were non-committal. White House officials were pleasantly surprised when they announced an arms cutoff. At the United Nations, China wavered again. There was doubt the Chinese would vote for a full embargo. U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering lobbied them vigorously, and they went along in the end.

President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, who once attended a Baltimore Orioles baseball game with Bush, played it both ways. From his first conversation with Bush on August 2, he supported military intervention, including deployment of Egyptian troops. But in public his government denied that. "There was a lot more consistency behind the scenes," says a White House aide who was in on the Bush-Mubarak phone chats. Mubarak wanted to line up Arab allies, which he didn't manage until August 11, before dispatching troops to Saudi Arabia. He was mad at Saddam Hussein for, among other things, having lied to him about plans to invade Kuwait. This made Mubarak all the more susceptible to Bush's persuasion.

King Fahd of Saudi Arabia was more threatened by Iraq than Mubarak was, but less persuadable. Bush called him from Aspen, but Fahd had questions about American resolve. Besides, said a Bush aide, "the ordinary way the Saudis deal with things is to pay people off." Fahd had to be talked out of paying an indemnity and into accepting U.S. troops and warplanes. After an August 4 meeting at Camp David, Bush called Fahd again and said he was sending Defense Secretary Dick Cheney to see him. Bush assured Fahd the United States wouldn't leave Saudi Arabia in the lurch. Fahd was not quite convinced. Cheney showed him satellite photos of Iraqi missiles aimed at four Saudi cities. This closed the deal. Cheney called Bush after his session with the news on the August 5. Military intervention and an economic blockade were set.

At the White House, the names that aroused the greatest anger were King Hussein of Jordan and CBS anchorman Dan Rather. Mention Rather's reports from Jordan on Arab anti-Americanism and Fitzwater erupts like Krakatoa. Of course, Bush never liked Rather. But he thought Hussein was a reliable friend. The king was one of the first people Bush called after the invasion. Hussein advocated an Arab solution. Later Bush was appalled when he saw (on TV) the king kissing Saddam Hussein on both cheeks and openly siding with Iraq. When Bush returned from Camp David on August 5, he

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said: "I am disappointed to find any comment by anyone that apologizes or appears to condone what's taken place." Three hours later Hussein called, attempting to patch things up. Bush was frosty. In the pinch, Hussein let him down. Nevertheless, Bush agreed to see the king at Kennebunkport on August 16 on the slim hope that he may help to find a way out of the crisis.

Thatcher never flinched. Bush readily agreed to see her when she asked to drop by the Oval Office on August 6. They conferred for ninety minutes. Afterward, they stepped outside to meet reporters. Bush spoke briefly, then turned to Thatcher. "Go ahead, please, Margaret," he said. Thatcher said she couldn't remember "a time when we had the world so strongly together against an action as now." Credit Bush for that. •

The man who would be Nasser.

THE PAN-ARAB FANTASY

By Martin Peretz

On his 1983 record *Infidels*, Bob Dylan, the poet-laureate of the counterculture, tells us that the "Neighborhood Bully"

> . . . Destroyed a bomb factory
> —nobody was glad.
> The bombs were meant for him,
> he was supposed to feel bad.

The song's title refers to Israel, of course, but it was meant ironically. The real bully of fact (and of Dylan's accurate imagination) was then, and (as the world can at last see) is now, Iraq. In his prayers toward Mecca five times a day King Fahd of Saudi Arabia might aptly beseech the Almighty to shower blessings on the Jews for their providential unilateral act of nuclear nonproliferation in 1981. It's not only he who should show such gratitude. Contemplate how much more brutal Iraq's wars with the Iranians and with its own Kurds and Shiites would have been had the Israelis not taken out the reactor at Osirak. Contemplate also the position of the other regional oil states whose riches Baghdad craves and that, were Saddam Hussein already commander of a nuclear arsenal, would long ago, have been put under Iraqi dominion.

Even without nuclear weapons Iraq has terrified those who live in its shadow. It is obvious why this is so. Iraq now possesses a rich assortment of other up-to-date technologies of death: it has advanced and ever more precise long-range missiles, as well as the ghoulish capability and the more ghoulish (and proven) will to mass murder by chemical and biological means. Yet what has bolstered most decisively the authority of the Baath regime is the sense, made palpable in Washington on every possible occasion throughout the last decade, that the United States had anointed Saddam Hussein as the man to deal with in the Middle East. No wonder King Hussein of Jordan thought his Baghdad genuflections were in tune with American policy: hadn't Robert Dole and Howard Metzenbaum only the day before yesterday certified Saddam as a moderate?

Still, in retrospect, it's difficult to reconstruct why the Western powers should have looked so favorably upon the president of Iraq and upon his dictatorship. It has been more than five years, after all, since a Shiite peril, against which he was thought a buffer, could have been considered serious. Khomeinism, that is, was long since spent, its remnant energies consumed with the fratricide among the mullahs. A more plausible explanation is that the Israelis were always cautioning us about Saddam Hussein's intentions and about his fanatic's zeal in pursuing them. It's a sad and paradoxical explanation: there are always high-placed folk in Washington whose friendly interest in a regime is directly proportional to Israel's anxieties about that regime. This is surely one reason why James Baker found Hussein so irresistible so long and so late. The secretary of state's appraisals evidently went down well with his boss in the White House. The two have much to live down. Their benign assessments of the Baghdad war machine were proffered in defiance of overwhelming evidence that they were false. Until only weeks before the invasion their minions were still trekking to Capitol Hill to reassure Congress that credits and guarantees were all that was needed to keep Hussein tame.

If George Bush were honest on this score he'd have to admit, like poor Jimmy Carter after Afghanistan, that, until the march into Kuwait he simply hadn't a clue. But there were clues aplenty. During the great Western celebration of the Iraqi victory over Iran, THE NEW REPUBLIC noted forebodingly ("From Nasser to Khomeini," August 22, 1988): "There are other Arab states that now have to fear the country whose war against Iran they funded: the Saudis, the Kuwaitis, the ruler of the emirates. . . . Iraq is poised to try to be the next great liberating Arab illumination in the sorry procession starting with Nasser's Egypt." If a small institutional boast may be permitted, that editorial concluded gloomily: "The only result of which we may be confident is that we will soon be looking down the barrel of another traumatic disenchantment."

Disenchantment should have come quickly. The testimony of Iraq's victims was both abundant and reliable. For example, as this magazine noted only one month later (September 26), "The Kurds of northern Iraq now are being murdered by the army of the state in which they live . . . with the same poison gas it used so effectively against Iranian civilians and against its own 'citizens' who had the misfortune to live in villages overrun by the Iranian army." It was a measure of the prevailing norms in Sunni Islam that such outrages produced scarcely a shudder of discomfort from

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Iraq's allies.

One of these allies no longer exists. After a few days as an "independent" but nearly faceless state Kuwait was unceremoniously swallowed up into the territorial corpus of the invader. Not since Hitler's pact with Stalin has a country vanished so quickly. About all that was left by mid-month was its chair at meetings of the Arab League. Seeing Kuwait's hereditary ruler in exile (and his relatives in reunion with their numbered bank accounts in Switzerland), five other allies, who with the now deposed Sabah dynasty had bankrolled Hussein's aggression against Iran, grudgingly permitted themselves to be defended by the United States against whatever fate Hussein had in store for them. (Six of the twelve votes in the League against Hussein were from governments he has threatened; two of the others were Syria's, its own and Lebanon's.) They are all in high dudgeon now, these men who'd barely registered the bloodthirstiness of Iraq that their own petrodollars had succored but never slaked.

Many illusions have been shattered in the Middle East during these last weeks, and these illusions are not just about Iraq. The story is not simply about a slightly crazed Saddam Hussein. It is more tellingly about the broader Arab culture from which he and others like him—Hussein's enemy, Hafez Assad, for instance—have emerged. That is why even the portentous pretender Edward Said is filled, as he wrote in the *Times*, "with dread and sorrow." Come September, alas, the Old Dominion Foundation professor in the humanities at Columbia University will have to face his colleagues. So he cannot do other than admit that Hussein is "a tyrant and an aggressor," though this may be Said's first such candid admission. This tyrant and aggressor "seems nevertheless to speak to hidden emotions and frustrations in the collective Arab soul." Here Said goes on the offensive. He debits these emotions and frustrations to the United States and, of course, to Israel. But they are too deep, too defining, too reflexive to be blamed yet again on others, a flimsy drapery to cover Arab shame.

John Kifner of *The New York Times* reported from Cairo that, at the official luncheon during the emergency Arab League assembly, the Iraqi delegation "threw plates of food" at other delegates. He does not tell us whether these delegates reciprocated. Still, the laughter this story must have evoked at breakfast tables outside the Arab world is only an extension of the shame felt within it. Maybe there shouldn't be laughter; more generous folk might be saddened by how Arab governments routinely conduct their affairs. Yet these governments, usually cohorts of cousins (the younger ones half-educated at third-string colleges in Texas and California), with their forked-tongue rhetoric, their callousness not only toward others but toward their own, their cynicism, command little respect, not even among those who, for whatever reasons, like them. This is the dirty little secret of everybody's foreign policy. At any rate, none of this—not the food throwing, not the inflated language of grievance and expectation—is evidence of the unity of the Arab nation.

Pan-Arabism has been a constant theme in Middle Eastern politics for over half a century. It always mesmerizes the Arab street and usually discomforts diplomats abroad. Dwight Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles were so taken in by the Pan-Arabism of Gamal Abdel Nasser that they betrayed our allies at Suez in 1956. But Pan-Arabism, it should at last be clear, is a fantasy. There are, to be sure, moments when it unites, as when passions have been mobilized against the Jews. At such times enormous resources can be marshaled from here, there, and everywhere to fight the enemy. The Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War were Pan-Arab wars, but failed ones; there has never been a successful Pan-Arab war. Even during these two exemplars of the type, however, Arab states struggled against each other for advantage. And from day to day, to say nothing of epiphanic episodes like the one we are now witnessing, Pan-Arabism is the constant object of constant intra-Arab conflict, a conflict for possession of its slogans, its draw on the hapless masses, and its power to intimidate and extort from the wealthy. To possess the delirious cachet of Pan-Arabism is to hold a warrant for others' goods and for their enthusiasms. Saddam Hussein has shown great skill in winning this mandate. But it is a treacherous mandate, inviting betrayal and tempted by vainglory.

Still, one shouldn't underestimate the extent of Hussein's achievement in forcing the old order to take refuge in the arms of the imperial power. The Iraqi regime of careless and casual non-believers can now go before the faithful and taunt its pious Saudi adversaries: the Ka'bah, the holy stone of a fierce faith, has been put under the protection of the hated Americans. One can scarcely imagine a more telling challenge to the legitimacy of the Wahabis than this dread and almost truthful charge.

Pan-Arabism is also a flimsy drapery over the intrinsic structural contradictions of Arab society. There are many Arab countries, but there is hardly an Arab nation-state. For better or for worse the nation-state is the paradigm of modern politics, and has been since at least the First World War. Polities aspire to the kind of solidarity that goes beyond political difference in nation-states. It is, then, a tormenting paradigm in many parts of the world, most notably now in the Soviet Union, where distinctive historic peoples struggle to escape from under the established central power, most commonly in order to form nation-states. It is somewhat different in the Arab orbit. There have, of course, been nationalist movements among the Arabs. There was even a nationalist movement in tiny Aden, which is now Yemen, and it frightened the British empire out of a strategic position at the entrance to the Red Sea. But while such nationalist movements did produce states, they did not derive from or produce nations. There was no Adeni nation then and there is no Yemeni nation

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now. For altogether different reasons there is no Lebanese nation, by which would be meant a population that thinks of itself as primarily Lebanese. More to the point: there is no Iraqi nation. The largest part of the Iraqi population sees itself as Shiite. Their sectarian identity is what weighs heaviest with them. And this is not only the case with the Shiites. Pan-Arabism is somehow supposed to compensate for the deficit in Iraqi identity by asserting a larger, all-embracing Arab one. Everyone knows that this is a fraud, a hoary deceit. On this Hussein is less skillful than he is coarse: the choice he offers is Pan-Arabism or death. There are also 3 million Kurds in Iraq, and even the most tolerant Pan-Arabism—oxymoronic though the idea seems—has zero appeal for them. They are not Arabs; they are . . . well, Kurds.

Not that Kuwait or Saudi Arabia is a nation either. Less than half of the population of what was Kuwait was Kuwaiti, and they too were riven along the Sunni-Shiite fault line. The others who lived there permanently were certainly not loyal to the Emir. They were loyal to the identities to which they were born. The Saudis were more phobic than the Kuwaitis, which is to say they were less hospitable to outsiders. Foreigners were made welcome in Kuwait City. In Riyadh they were seen as a fifth column: they might, for example, drink beer. (Pity the first American soldier who, on leave in what passes for the big city, is arrested drunk.) But Saudi Arabia is not a modern polity at all. It is not much less populous than Iraq, and it is far richer. But it never occurred to anyone that the defense of Saudi Arabia might be shouldered by the Saudi Arabians. It isn't because they're without loads of advanced weaponry, acquired from the United States, Britain, and West Germany. Asked why Saudi Arabia buys so many airplanes and tanks they can't use, a shrewd observer explained, "It's for the commissions the sales bring to the key princes in the . . . House of Saud." The problem with Saudi Arabia is that there are no Saudi Arabians. Most of its people live in remote mountains by the rules of their clan or of their tribe; they don't even know what a nation is. Those few in the populace who might be Saudi Arabians or who might form an enduring Saudi Arabian elite are in London.

Notice that none of these countries can count on the fidelity of its citizens because the country is a democracy. Kuwait came closest; it had a parliament that might, if asked, offer an opinion to the ruler. But in 1986 the ruler dissolved this not-so-troublesome parliament because it was too troublesome. This leaves the initiative to Saddam Hussein. He had once muttered something about bringing parliamentary government to Iraq; the first step he took in this direction was to make himself president for life. This was not a propitious beginning. Some Washington insiders say they are hoping that the internal Iraqi opposition will overthrow Hussein. There is no internal Iraqi opposition. Saddam Hussein's opponents are dead.

Jordan's King Hussein has actually conducted a recent experiment in democracy. He held legislative elections in which Muslim fundamentalists scored big victories. These fundamentalists are Sunnis, not Shiites. Yes, Virginia, there are Sunni fundamentalists; in fact, most of the world's Muslim fundamentalists are Sunnis. When you read about the Muslim Brotherhood you're not reading about Shiites. The Jordanian elections showed how precarious is Hussein's hold on the country. Like Iraq, Jordan is an improvisation of the British colonial office. Its royal house was transported from the Arabian desert to another one. The only real Jordanians are the king's cousins. It's another reason why his throne is so shaky. Probably half his people would prefer Yasir Arafat in Hussein's place in Amman.

It was in part to placate these subjects that King Hussein has sided with Saddam Hussein against his "legitimist" monarchical inclinations. Of course, it was also to placate Saddam himself, lest the Iraqis decide that Jordan is also part of their patrimony. All of these considerations could concentrate the mind even of a monarch who prefers skiing to statecraft. He, too, now mouths the clichés about the Arab nation as a way to divert from the empty shell that is his own state. His obsequiousness to Baghdad has certainly hurt his standing in the United States, where he had always played to rave reviews. The administration has been particularly fierce with the king over the fact that the Jordanian port at Aqaba has been transporting goods to and from Iraq in violation of international sanctions.

But King Hussein is one of Bush's old pals. That's why he has been allowed to come to Kennebunkport to say what he has to say. But a proposal he brokers couldn't be other than a dishonest one. Like James Baker, the Arab oil sheikhs are always more interested in a deal than in principles of international order. So they, too, will be interested in his message. But they will not be easily conciliated by his role in helping Saddam hijack Pan-Arabism for Iraqi ends. The king's image will now, after many years of adroit masking, be brought into line with his reality: a cynical and frightened man who in a crisis runs with the mob. Or with the demagogue who at the moment is rousing the mob. King Hussein did precisely this in 1967, and lost half his kingdom. The rest is now up for grabs. Some right-wing Israelis say that Jordan is already Palestine; all that has to be done, they argue, is to make it official.

Aside, of course, from the Kuwaitis, the biggest losers in this episode of perfervid Pan-Arabism are the Palestinians. They have shown themselves to be faithless. The Emir of Kuwait underwrote many of their expenses and hosted their diaspora. If Lebanon had once been the political capital of Palestinianism, Kuwait had remained its financial capital. The Emir indulged the equivalent of a PLO internal revenue service. Little will be left of the riches of these people when Saddam Hussein has finished his feasting on their wealth. Moreover, the example of Palestinian treachery toward Kuwait will be a

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cautionary tale to the other oil states, most notably to Saudi Arabia, which expended billions over the years on the distant and perpetual Palestinian revolution. Already there is discord in the PLO leadership over the organization's lining up behind Hussein's aggression. Many of Arafat's lieutenants are restive: they sense their lush lifestyle ending when Saudi and emirate financial lubrications cease. It is not, mind you, a matter of principle or even a diplomatic calculus that repels them; it's the prospect of becoming impecunious revolutionaries.

But the consequences for the Palestinians are far more serious than mere monetary ones. The spectacle of Arafat's embrace of Saddam Hussein will undoubtedly give pause even to the PLO's most hardened enthusiasts in Europe and the United States. What kind of a regime, some of them must be asking themselves, would Arafat impose on his people if Hussein so engages his ardors? Arafat's solemn and subservient embrace of Hussein also had its slightly comic aspects. It's not as if Iraq had conquered a country that had put up a defense. Arafat was paying tribute to someone whose legions had rolled over a small and utterly helpless wonderland principality, an Arab Ruritania. From this are heroes made in Araby. No one has observed, I think, that Arafat's links to Baghdad had been shored up, in good times and bad, by one of his trusted associates, Abu Abbas, the terrorist responsible for the *Achille Lauro* murder and the recent raid on the beaches south of Tel Aviv. Forgotten now are the efforts to convince Arafat to say the right words disavowing this particular Abu's deeds. All of the talk about how Arafat had really forsworn terrorism seems faintly preposterous now that he has endorsed the political ambitions of the world's leading terrorist state.

On the occasion of Iraq's latest aggression Yasir Arafat has demonstrated how well he too can sing in the Pan-Arab chorus. And his followers in the occupied territories have shown that they also know the tunes. The hysterical apotheosis of Hussein that accompanies Pan-Arabism today is a confession of Palestinian emptiness and defeat. Babies born in the West Bank are now being named after the Baghdad tyrant. The Kuwait adventure has instantly eclipsed the intifada in the mythology of Arab and Palestinian politics. But what is more remarkable is the ease and rapidity with which the Palestinian leadership has lapsed into the habits of what in the end will be only a polemically satisfying Pan-Arabism. Not so long ago the Palestinian revolution was going to liberate the whole of the Arab world. This was the grandiloquent moment in Palestinian history. Now the Palestinians await the crossing by the Iraqis of the Jordan River. It is pathetic. It is not only Israelis who will ask: By what degraded standards of politics can the PLO have been labeled "moderate"? Even the Egyptians, long-time interlocutors for Arafat in Washington, may now put the query to themselves. This is much more than a cognitive question. It is also a strategic one, and one that will inevitably affect both Israeli and U.S. policy toward the Palestinians in the territories. Given the demonstrable cultural affinities of the Palestinians for Hussein's kind of politics, and their exuberance for it, what concessions is it reasonable to press the Israelis to make? Surely one wouldn't want to sponsor circumstances in which chemical and biological agents from Iraq could easily imperil Israel through a rump called Palestine. So whatever happens to the territories, they must be policed by Israel, at the frontiers and internally. This leaves only so much room for sovereignty.

The Palestinians have only themselves to blame for their predicament. Again and again they have behaved in ways that validate the Israeli hard line. For the Israelis this is a matter of life and death. Sentimentality about Palestinian self-determination is for them, in this situation, a luxury. They need not be burdened by excessive guilt; the Palestinians of the territories lead more tranquil and more abundant lives, and freer lives too, than do the Arabs of Syria and Iraq, Egypt and Jordan. More abundant and tranquil lives than are lived by Palestinians anyplace in the region but the place that was Kuwait. The sway of Hussein over the Palestinian militias and over the Palestinian streets cannot be shrugged off. As Professor Said has testified, Hussein speaks to the "hidden emotions" of all Arabs. This is warning enough for me.

Instead of cheering for Hussein, the Palestinians should be praying that the U.S. forces in the area will soon take him out, and with him also take out the network of armaments that makes Iraq in this regard a twenty-first century power. If the Iraqi danger to Israel and to the other Arab states were removed, U.S. policy would not be hobbled by his ghastly shadow over politics and life. The "doves," doubtless, won't see it this way. They are already seeking some means for Hussein to save face, as if that were his goal. The restoration of the *status quo ante*, however, as Edward N. Luttwak argues (see "Kuwaiting Game," page 25), would be a defeat. It would squander the advances in understanding made in both American and world public opinion about how to deal with states like Iraq in the post-cold war era.

Which brings us to the role of the United States. Almost everybody has been jolted by the centrality of this country in any effort to secure some tolerable order where strife otherwise rules. Many Americans of internationalist bent had begun to accede to the new orthodoxy, i.e., the United States was already a bystander country. It is not so. It was not Helmut Kohl who put together the near unanimous consensus that the economies of both the advanced and underdeveloped countries needed to be rescued from an avaricious aggressor, and that the region over which that aggressor dominated needed to be rescued from him, too. And it certainly wasn't Mikhail Gorbachev who put this consensus together either; he wasn't an actor at all. The effort to secure his concurrence was more politesse than politics. In any event, whatever consensus was reached, its execution depended on American resources and American determination. It's true that

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George Bush needed some prodding in all this. (Thank God, James Baker was off doing his job as our ambassador to Moscow.) Nonetheless, it was Bush who took the decisive first initiatives, and he has gone beyond the constricted reading of a Security Council resolution to assure their success. For the moment at least, the Democrats remain on board, though they'll soon be tempted to desert. Still, the president probably won't by himself be inclined to take the next steps, which are the steps required to bring Hussein's reign of terror to an end. Maybe Hussein will force the president's hand. Maybe not. One thing is sure: if the United States is to bring this intervention to a really successful conclusion George Bush cannot satisfy himself with some dishonest *après moi le déluge* formula the timid Arab royals decide is tolerable. This is one of those cases in which prudence and daring point to the same actions: hold firm and then fire. •

What's the Soviet game in the Gulf?

VIRTUAL ALLY

By Edward Jay Epstein

The Soviet Union is America's "virtual ally" in the Iraqi confrontation, according to *The New York Times*. News Quiz:

A virtual ally is one that:

A) Gives good joint communiqués condemning Iraq.

B) Provides Iraq with more than 8,000 military advisers and other specialists—and does not withdraw them even after condemning its invasion of Kuwait.

C) Sells Iraq the helicopters, landing craft, surface-to-air missiles, T-72 tanks, night-fighting equipment, and spare parts it needed for its blitzkrieg of Kuwait.

D) Votes in support of the United States in the U.N. Security Council for an embargo that will cause the price of oil to skyrocket.

E) Fails to join the U.S. blockade of Iraq on grounds it has not been legally authorized by the U.N.

F) Maintains its friendship treaty alliance with Iraq even after its invasion.

G) Supplies Iraq over the past year with advanced MiG-29 fighters with extended range kits and surface-to-surface missiles that now threaten Saudi Arabia.

H) Trains Iraq's general staff officers and helped organize its intelligence service over the past three decades.

I) Hosts a fishing vacation in Siberia for the U.S. Secretary of State at the height of the crisis.

The answer, of course, is: all of the above. These actions may seem confusing if not inconsistent, if it is assumed that the Soviet Union has a common interest with the United States in maintaining the peace and stability of the Persian Gulf and its oil production. But is that the case? Even in the glasnostized world of joint communiqués and fishing vacations, the United States and the USSR have sharply different interests in the Persian Gulf.

First, the United States is the world's largest importer of energy and the Soviet Union is the world's largest exporter, which means that when there is chaos in the Persian Gulf, and the price ratchets up, it is the United States' loss and the Soviet Union's gain. The United States imports an average of about 7 million barrels of oil a day, which means that each dollar increase drains more than $2 billion a year from the U.S. economy (while higher fuel prices divert resources from other, more productive, activities). The Soviet Union, on the other hand, exports 3.3 million barrels of crude oil a day (about the same as Saudi Arabia) and, in addition, sells Europe almost an equivalent amount of natural gas, the price of which is contractually tied to the price of a barrel of oil. So each dollar rise generated by Persian Gulf tensions adds nearly $2 billion a year to the foreign earnings of the Soviet Union. Energy already provides the USSR with 70 percent to 80 percent of its hard currency earnings. If the price of oil were driven up to $40 a barrel, as it was in Iraq's prior war in the Gulf in 1980, the Soviet Union could expect to increase its hard currency earnings by nearly $40 billion a year, not to mention the increased earnings its gold, silver, and diamond exports would bring in (precious metals go up in a crisis—gold has already risen $50 an ounce—and the Soviet Union is the world's second-largest producer of gold, after South Africa). This would go a long way to ameliorating its economic problems. On the other hand, such a price increase would undoubtedly plunge the United States into a depression.

Second, tension in the Persian Gulf benefits Soviet arms sales. The Soviet Union is the primary arms supplier to all the radical states—Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iran. With war in the Gulf, and an American blockade, these countries can be expected to buy more Soviet planes, missiles, and radar, either to protect themselves from Iraq or to counter the American intervention. This means more Soviet advisers, more training facilities, and more revenues. Much of the money for Syrian arms comes from Saudi Arabia, which pays the Soviet Union for most arms purchases by loading Saudi oil onto Soviet tankers—a quasi-blackmail arrangement worked out after Carlos the Terrorist (who was protected by the Soviet intelligence services and operated from Hungary) kidnapped Sheikh Yamani and other OPEC ministers from a Vienna meeting in 1973. (In order to get its oil minister back, Saudi Arabia became amenable to financing less well-endowed Arab regimes.) Iran, which is now modernizing with Soviet equipment, and Libya also pay with oil. In all, the Soviets now get a half million barrels a day for their arms, and this will increase. The Soviets, despite their new status as virtual allies, ship

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part of the Arab oil to Cuba to help subsidize its activities in Latin America.

Third, the more risky Persian Gulf oil becomes, the more attractive Soviet gas becomes. Soviet natural gas is an alternative to Persian Gulf crude for both Europe and Japan. The Soviet Union already is delivering some 40 billion cubic meters of gas a year to Europe from its Ural and Siberian fields (as well as from Iran and Afghanistan). It has also been quietly negotiating a deal under which Japan would develop gas fields in eastern Siberia and build a pipeline across the Sakalin peninsula to the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. If the crisis goes on for a year or so, Japan reasonably can be expected to sign up for Soviet gas.

Unlike the United States, then, the Soviet Union gains from an extended embargo in the Persian Gulf. The hotter the crisis, the better. It loses only if Iraq gives up, or is otherwise defeated.

The odd part of this virtual alliance is not merely the conflict of interest but the unwillingness of the United States to ask the sort of questions it would have asked in the pre-glasnost era if a Soviet military client, with a friendship treaty, invaded a U.S. ally. According to one Pentagon source, the United States had not even determined the role or number of Soviet technicians advising the Iraq army. All that the Soviets will say officially is, "I think the advice to Iraq to attack Kuwait did not come from our advisers." This still leaves open such questions as:

1) Did the USSR have advance knowledge of well-designed Iraqi plans to invade Kuwait? After all, unlike the United States, the Soviet Union had military advisers in Iraq attached to the helicopter, tank, logistic, and radar units used for the invasion, and the KGB presumably had developed sources from the three generations of Iraqi staff and planning officers trained by Moscow.

2) What was the mission of Colonel General Albert Makashov, the former commander of Volga-Urals Command, to Baghdad as Soviet military counselor two weeks prior to the invasion?

3) How could Iraq be sure that Syria would not take advantage of its confrontation with the United States, unless it had made some arrangement with Syria in advance? If so, did the Soviets act as the intermediary?

4) Is the Soviet Union going to use its position on the U.N. Security Council to call for a non-military solution—i.e., an embargo but not air or naval actions—which will lead to a prolonged stalemate?

5) How are the Soviets able to make arrangements for Soviet citizens to leave Iraq, and why are there no Soviet hostages?

If it turns out the Soviet Union is pursuing its own interest in the Persian Gulf, the result could be an endless crisis and zooming oil prices. With a virtual ally like that, who needs enemies?

EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN is the author of *Deception: The Invisible Wall Between the KGB and the CIA* (Simon and Schuster).

A passion play.

THIEF OF BAGHDAD

By Fouad Ajami

The outline of the story reads like the outline of a passion play.

A redeemer with a black turban rises in the east, the holy city of Qom. He summons the downtrodden to rebellion, citing corruption and arrogance, the attachment of the wealthy and the mighty to the ways of the infidels. The redeemer promises salvation and deliverance. Around him are "cities of brass" loaded with wealth that dread his message. A gendarme, a cruel upstart nearby in a city known for its barbarous ways, steps forth. The upstart offers his protection to the cities of fabled wealth. The grandees in the cities of wealth know the would-be protector as he really is, but they go along, rewarding him handsomely for his services. Starved of sources of sustenance, the redeemer's armies are contained; the old firebrand dies a broken man, cursing his enemies in his "last will and testament." But no sooner has the dust of battle settled then the barbarous protector's armies appear at the gates of the most vulnerable of the cities. He has come for extortion, the grandees think. They feign courage at first, then give in, but there would be no way of buying off the challenger; he had come to conquer. His armies trample and loot the city of wealth. Thus the curse of the redeemer comes to be fulfilled through the strangest of ways.

The Emir of Kuwait didn't think it would come to this. In exile he recalled times when he and Saddam Hussein broke bread together. Bedouin-style, Hussein would pick for the Emir choice cuts of lamb, and place them on the Emir's plate himself. By the ways of the place, the old ways, this was a special demonstration of fidelity and friendship. There were other acts of kindness. Back in 1985, at the height of the Ayatollah Khomeini's campaign of terror, the Emir was the target of an assassination attempt by a Shiite terrorist; he suffered minor injuries when a suicide driver attacked his motorcade. There were daily calls from brother Saddam, inquiring about the health of His Excellency the Emir. There was a division of labor then. A job had to be done. The Persian state and its Shiite tributaries in the Arab world had thrown together the ruling Gulf dynasties and the Iraqi dictator.

That was an odd alliance, the hereditary rulers and sheikhs joined with the brutal upstart in Baghdad. In the scheme of things the Kuwaitis displayed greater zeal toward the Iran-Iraq war than they are normally known for. In its policies and attitudes toward the war the Kuwaiti merchant state must have played out its

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own sectarian tension between its Sunni majority and substantial Shiite minority. Fear of Iraq must have played a part as well.

The Kuwaitis did their bit. In addition to their financial aid to the Iraqis, they turned to the dumping of oil as a deliberate weapon against Iran. Four years ago the Kuwaitis helped keep the price of oil around $15 to $17 a barrel. The back of the Iranian economy was broken. The revolution's bid for hegemony would soon be called off. But before the Iranian revolutionaries acknowledged the limits of their power, the Kuwaitis had panicked. Trouble had come closer to home, threatening their commerce and oil shipments. Descendants of wily emirs who had been Pax Britannica's wards and protégés in order to keep the Ottoman Turks and neighboring predators at bay, the Kuwaitis turned to the Americans. The United States obliged, re-flagging Kuwaiti ships and engaging the Iranians in the Gulf. The dominant order in the Gulf survived—or so it seemed.

Hussein, however, was a restless man. He had run his country down during the war with Iran. He was now determined to get his fair price for the service he had rendered the Gulf Arabs by defeating the "fire-worshiping Persians." He had defended the "eastern gate" of the Arab world; "Rivers of blood" (the words are from an Iraqi memorandum submitted to the Kuwaitis and to the Arab League shortly before the invasion) had flowed in defense of other Arabs. The "flower of Iraqi youth" had been sacrificed on the battlefield so that "Arab dignity and honor and fortunes" would be secured.

But there was no gratitude for what Iraq had done. Worse still, the Iraqis complained, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates were exceeding their oil quotas. The Iraqis wanted to put an end to that. And there were those old colonial borders drawn in 1922 by one of Pax Britannica's finest, Sir Percy Cox, the high commissioner in Iraq. Sir Percy had drawn a line from the Persian Gulf to the Transjordan frontier that demarcated the boundaries of Iraq, the Saudi realm, and Kuwait. The Iraqis wanted to change those colonial borders as well. A trap was being set for the Kuwaitis, who fell for it. Perhaps they were emboldened by the re-flagging episode and never believed that they would be left to the tender mercies of Baghdad. When they finally gave in over the production of oil, it was too late.

Hussein struck in August. He chose a time when tens of thousands of Kuwaiti professionals and merchants were in Cairo and Europe and elsewhere for the summer holidays. If he was coming to stay, it was better to strike when the well-off and the articulate were away. He wanted an easier place to rule. Hussein's troops made a dash to the Central Bank and to the Ministry of Interior, where citizenship and birth records are kept. The second target was of greater importance. He wanted "the files" on the few dissidents and troublemakers, and he wanted to tamper with the principality's birth records. Full citizenship in Kuwait had been a rare privilege. It was even denied to many soldiers. Hussein was in it all the way. The birth records would be his: there would be new "Kuwaitis" from Iraq to press a claim on the shackled principality.

He said that his forces had come to Kuwait for "a few days, perhaps for a few weeks." The Kuwaitis had been here before. In 1961 Iraq had made a push into Kuwait as soon as Britain had granted the principality independence; the Iraqi's were thwarted by Britain. But we live in a postcolonial world. The Kuwaitis were on their own this time around.

There was the one Kuwaiti broadcaster whose last appeal was to the Arabs to come to the rescue of *Kuwaiti al Arab*, the Kuwait of the Arabs. He needn't have bothered. Kuwait was too rich and sanitized for the poor Arabs who envied the principality's wealth and good fortune, too feeble and pampered for the despots and those who had visions of deliverance into a new world of political power. In the Arab response to Kuwait's conquest were to be heard echoes of the response to the fall of Beirut a generation earlier: "Farewell, the pampered city." Success taunts failure. The large shopping mall by the Gulf was too orderly for the neighborhood. Even the Palestinians who prospered in Kuwait turned away from it. More than Beirut even, this had been home for the Palestinians, a place where untold thousands among them, Yasir Arafat included, put together their lives after 1948, and made their fortunes. "We built the place," said a Palestinian academic. "But we were always hired hands." With bitterness he recalled the favorite saying of the Palestinian and other Arab expatriates in Kuwait: two things were cheap in Kuwait, cigarettes and the dignity of man. He recalled as well that each time he left Kuwait he needed an exit visa from his employer. "They don't do this in South Africa," he added. It was not generous, that principality in the Gulf. There would be no tears shed for Kuwait.

In no time a legend was to be born among some of the Arabs: the legend of Hussein the avenger, bringing down the mighty, promising the poor a share of the loot. The legend found ready believers, the early dispatches tell us, in Amman and Yemen, among the Palestinians on the West Bank of Gaza, even in places of relative order such as Tunisia. Hussein had fought the Ayatollah Khomeini for nearly a decade: he now paid his old nemesis a curious compliment, borrowing Khomeini's language of fire and brimstone. He had come to Kuwait for the disinherited, a night of wilding to be enjoyed by all those who were there and those who were not. And he came as well to fulfill God's command. When the Americans dispatched their troops to Saudi Arabia there was Hussein the pious leader, the commander of the faithful, calling the community to a holy war. There was something for everyone in the conquest of Kuwait: piety for the faithful, nationalism and Arab unity for the nationalists, and just plain revenge for those who appreciated a spectacle of ruin in a place that had been pampered and precious. One more claim, my favorite: by his reckoning Hussein was in Kuwait to protect the honor of Arab women against the emirs and the "procurers" who lead Arab women into "whoredom."

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The promise of a strongman offering a fix never dies in vanquished civilizations. Hussein now presents himself as the new redeemer. Before the cameras, Hussein moves deliberately. On the screen he is more seen than heard. Thus the mystery and the aura remain; there is an eerie quality to it. In a talkative, expressive culture he is sparing with his words. There is none of the passion and the energy of Gamal Abdel Nasser, who is said to have been young Hussein's hero. The great pronouncements that followed the invasion of Kuwait were read for him by broadcasters who looked like younger clones of him. He, the conqueror, would remain almost unaffected by the tumult. The silent, deliberate man of deeds as a cure for a culture of words and defeat. There was one symbolic message the conqueror delivered. Before the cruel deed in Kuwait was done Hussein strutted about in military uniform. After the invasion he made one appearance with a new attire, a white Kuwaiti *deshdasha* (the long shirt) and a white *kefiyeh*, the attire of the Kuwaitis. The Emir had been a "father" to his people. In his place was Hussein, the man who would be Emir. The 250 years of the House of Sabah are thus annulled. Hussein needs no ancestors. He is the soldier who makes his own luck. His majesty derives from his violence and audacity.

Away from the large prison Hussein has built for his cowed people, and from the hell he unleashed in Kuwait, there were takers. In the town of Beit Fajjar, on the West Bank, a science teacher says: "Saddam is no Hitler. He is the second Saladin [the commander of the Muslim armies that liberated Jerusalem and repelled the Crusades in the closing years of the twelfth century]." The despot from the little town of Tikrit has come a long way. His is the third bid, over the last four decades, to reorder and dominate the politics of the Arab-Muslim world. The earlier bids were made by Nasser and Khomeini. Where Nasser wanted to be loved and Khomeini to be obeyed, Hussein wants to be feared. This third bid is made of far deadlier material than the other two. It has behind it the drive of a quiet assassin, the despotism and cruelty of the country he rules, and weapons of mass destruction. Is it mere consolation, though, to say that this remains the bid of a man at the helm of a brittle state with little industrial skills and agricultural resources, a state self-sufficient only in dates and barley?

Hussein thrived when others chose to look away or when there was some dirty job to be done that he volunteered to do, or when his victims were dispossessed Shiite dissidents, Kurdish mountaineers, or Iranians on a rampage. All this is behind him. On the Kuwaiti-Saudi border, Hussein has the world's undivided attention. He has pulled off a big heist, and the stakes are much larger than the neighborhood heists he was so good at in the past. He is in prime time now. And everyone has sworn that Hussein will not be allowed to get away with it and fence his stolen goods.

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Two decades of fecklessness.

RUINED PILLARS

By Elie Kedourie

The president's sudden decision to send a very large contingent of troops to Saudi Arabia cannot have been taken with a light heart. Apart from the risks, electoral and otherwise, to which it exposes his administration, the decision constitutes the acknowledgment of a failed policy. Only days before Saddam Hussein began to threaten Kuwait, the official position was that criticism of Iraq, or any attempt to indicate displeasure with its policies, was inadvisable; that even though relations with the regime were awkward, it was important to remain on good terms. The rationale of such a policy—which was also adopted by the British Foreign Office—has never been fully explained; nor has any official or political figure been rebuked, demoted, or dismissed for flagrant misjudgment.

We do not know what evidence led the administration to conclude, so precipitately, that Saudi Arabia was mortally threatened by an imminent invasion. The Iraqis had marched into, and unceremoniously annexed, Kuwait. The answer to this action has been a condemnation by the U.N. Security Council, which declared the annexation null and void, and instituted economic sanctions against Iraq. What remains highly obscure is the relation between the dispatch of troops to defend Saudi Arabia and the enforcement of the sanctions. Is the plan to leave U.S. troops facing Iraqi troops on the Saudi-Kuwait border, perhaps for months on end, waiting for an attack that may never come, in the meantime hoping that Hussein may be forced to give up Kuwait by the mere pressure of economic sanctions? Sanctions may take months if not years to bite, assuming they work at all. In the past, whether imposed by the League of Nations or by the United Nations, they have been uniformly a failure. Insisting that sanctions will be made to work, the president has expressed the hope that the Iraqi people will persuade Hussein to change his ways!

Many obscurities, then, surround this affair, which heightens doubts about its management and about the resoluteness with which it will be pursued. The situation is fraught with the dangers of inaction and the possibilities of fiasco, which would put at mortal risk, among much else, the very regime U.S. troops were sent to protect. Such doubts are not inspired solely by the little that the authorities have seen fit to disclose to the public. They spring from the whole course of U.S. policy in the Middle East during the last two decades or so.

When the Shah was still on his throne and Richard

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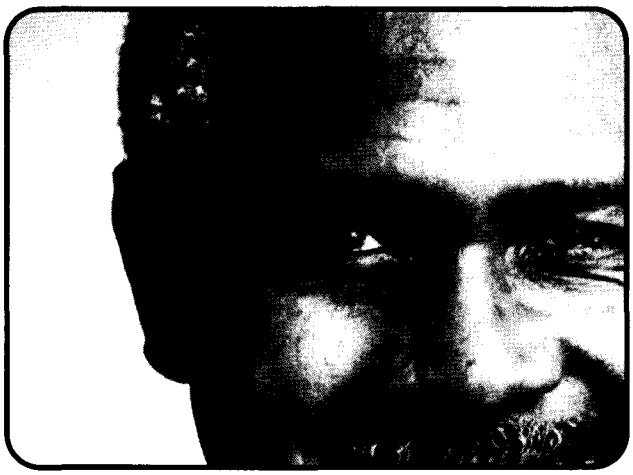

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Nixon in the White House, it was decided to base the security of the United States and the safeguard of its interest in the Middle East on the twin pillars of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The policy was flimsy and fanciful in the extreme. Still, it was justified with the argument that these two states, both very rich and territorially extensive, would act as regional stabilizers and, if worst came to worst, as tripwires for the Soviets (against whom the policy was, of course, directed). As the present emergency shows, one of the pillars, Saudi Arabia, is so shaky that it must be shored up. We may also suspect that this would have been true with Iran under the Shah. In any case, with his fall, the policy lost any credibility it might once have had.

Even when in place, the policy never really worked. For one, it failed to keep OPEC from operating as a cartel. Following the outbreak of the Yom Kippur war in 1973, OPEC increased prices more than threefold, and its Arab members imposed an embargo on countries accused of being friendly to Israel. The OPEC cartel threatened the supply of oil to the industrialized world, and it constituted a species of economic war to which a riposte proved impossible, not least because Iran and Saudi Arabia—two main producers and OPEC ringleaders—could hardly be restrained by any credible U.S. action or threat. The second event that put at risk the supply and flow of this strategic, indeed indispensable, commodity was the Iraq-Iran war. During that war both Iraqi and Iranian oil terminals were destroyed, and tankers were susceptible to aerial attack by the belligerents, predominantly Iraq. The third occasion has arisen now, with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. We would be deluding ourselves if we think that such emergencies will not arise in the future.

This leads us to the other grave consequence of the failure to break the OPEC cartel. Before its members had accrued vast revenues from their exploitation of monopoly power, those countries that supplied them with weapons did so largely to exercise some control over their policies. After 1973, however, selling weapons became less a policy question and more one of trade. Arms became a commodity like any other—French perfumes, Swiss watches, Rolls-Royces—that many Western countries sold in ever larger quantities in order to mop up as many petrodollars as possible. The Iraq-Iran war would not have raged for eight years, or the Lebanese civil war continued for a decade and a half, or the invasion of Kuwait taken place had the endless supply of petrodollars not been available for the purchase of the most sophisticated weapons of destruction.

The twin pillars approach, ineffective and costly though it was, at least constituted a policy. Since its collapse, U.S. action in the region has been for the most part little more than a succession of ad hoc reactions. So it was when Sadat decided, much to the surprise and perhaps dismay of U.S. officials, to visit Jerusalem and begin negotiations with Israel. So it was again when the Ayatollah Khomeini took over in Iran and then took U.S. diplomats hostage. So it was also during and after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, when the United States acted by fits and starts, in spasms of sudden activity, to be followed by quiescence, followed by still more bursts of inconsequential activity. In all this frantic movement it was difficult to detect any long-term view of how best to safeguard U.S. interests, or of which outcomes would be considered desirable, and which could on no account be stomached.

We have thus seen U.S. energies expended on the manifestly impossible, or on enterprises that, even if they were to succeed, would be of doubtful benefit to the United States. Much effort was spent on negotiating an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty in 1983, when it was obvious that such a treaty would be worthless without Syrian approval. Similarly, the Reagan and Bush administrations, wed to the belief that a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the most urgent issue confronting the United States in the Middle East, have engaged in endless futile negotiations with the PLO and other parties. Even if the talks led to the formation of a PLO-ruled entity in the territories occupied by Israel, endless trouble would ensue. Such an entity would be poor, irredentist, unstable, a threat to Jordan, unable to find a place for the Palestinians now in the Lebanese camps and elsewhere, and subject to manipulation by various Arab states.

Anyway, why is it a U.S. interest to see that the Arab-Israeli conflict is settled? Is it seriously believed that such a settlement would leave the Middle East free of conflict, or that even worse conflicts might not come to take its place? In its single-minded pursuit of an Arab-Israeli settlement, the United States has paid no attention to other possible conflicts in the region. It is plain that the likelihood of Iraq's move and of its potential consequences was never even considered, or, if considered, was then dismissed out of hand.

How otherwise to explain what is called the tilt toward Iraq that appeared in the latter years of the Iraq-Iran war? The highly expert engineers who executed this delicate operation now explain that the tilt was designed to counteract Khomeini's expansionist fundamentalism, which was threatening to sweep all before it. But if there was fear of the Ayatollah's expansionism, why was there no fear of a Pan-Arab crusade, much more attractive in the predominantly Sunni Middle East than Khomeini's bizarre theocracy? Pan-Arabism is the principal tenet of Baathism, the official doctrine of the Iraqi regime. It is exactly the same doctrine in the name of which Gamal Abdel Nasser wreaked such havoc, until he was stopped in his tracks by the Six-Day War. Nasser too had many admirers in official Washington in his glory days.

In the war between Iran and Iraq, it was not in the interest of the United States for either Iran or Iraq to win. In the event, the tilt tilted so far that it destroyed Iran's capacity to make war, and enabled Hussein to claim victory—a claim that emboldened him to invade Kuwait. If he now feels disappointed, even betrayed, by the U.S. reaction to what he has done, who can blame him?

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KUWAITING GAME

By Edward N. Luttwak

The Bush administration has been perfectly competent, the Soviet Union has been decisively cooperative, the Europeans and Japanese are beginning to help, Hosni Mubarak of Egypt has emerged as the principled leader of an anti-Iraq Arab coalition, the Saudis have been brave enough to allow themselves to be protected, and even the U.N. Security Council has been functioning usefully for the very first time. Yet the potential for a disaster is great, because the crisis is unfolding amid a maelstrom of deceptive analogies and delusive notions of victory in which grave predicaments remain unaddressed.

Cartoonists all over the world have happily embraced the Hitler/Hussein analogy (see cover), but policymakers should be more careful. President Bush implicitly compared Saddam Hussein to Hitler so as to offer himself as the Churchill of the hour—not the historical Churchill of 1940 who could only resist Hitler at the last ditch of the English Channel, but a far better Churchill already in office by 1935, ready to confront Hitler as soon as he had taken his first aggressive step, the remilitarization of the Rhineland. That the outcome would then have been wonderfully superior to the history that followed, from Munich to the final Götterdämmerung, is supposedly the most definitive of all "lessons of history."

Volunteer air-raid wardens anxiously scrutinizing the London skies during the Blitz can be excused for believing that Hitler should indeed have been stopped peacefully by a show of "resolve" five years earlier—as Churchill long claimed. But only an extreme degree of cognitive dissonance can allow us to continue to believe that now. For a second look at the Hitler analogy suggests a very different lesson. By 1945, even with critical materials absent or in very short supply and with industries absorbed in weapons production, and under increasingly heavy bombardment, Hitler's Luftwaffe was flying jet fighters and jet bombers wholly superior to any that Allied designers could even envisage; his navy had the world's first true submarines that could sink ships at will then outrun most escorts with ease; his army had Panther and Tiger tanks completely superior to U.S. Shermans; and his more advanced undertakings included the V-1 cruise missile, a jewel of economy, as well as the world's first ballistic missile, anti-aircraft missile, anti-tank missile, and anti-ship missile. True, retarded by self-punishing prejudice ("Jewish physics"), Hitler's artfully fragmented bureaucracies all mismanaged their competing nuclear efforts—but nuclear weapons would not have eluded them for long had it not been for the overriding urgencies of war, which naturally promoted current production over uncertain innovations.

Thus if Churchill had indeed stopped Hitler's early aggressions by a show of "resolve" after the Rhineland, with no Austria, Czechoslovakia, or war-triggering Poland to follow, Hitler could have awaited his moment until 1945, as his military planners intended, to launch his war with jet airpower, the new U-boats, Panthers, Tigers, and all the missiles. Given the destructions that Hitler did achieve after a mere five years of war preparation, what could have happened in a war further delayed to Hitler's very great advantage is too horrible to imagine.

The Hitler problem of the 1930s was not that Hitler was so eagerly aggressive. That, if anything, offered the opportunity of a solution at each remove, by going to war—an opportunity finally seized in 1939 over Poland. The true Hitler problem was that he had successfully constructed a regime capable of accumulating military power at a faster rate than any coalition of his neighbors could match. Hence the balance of military power was shifting in Hitler's favor with every passing day, in a process that only war itself could interrupt. Contrary to the "lesson" constantly invoked, the outbreak of war in 1939 was not the avoidable penalty for insufficient resolve early on, but rather the only possible remedy, already too long delayed.

Iraq is not Germany and lacks its formidable skills, but the true Hussein problem is likewise the inordinate ability of his regime to accumulate power, and not the impulsive aggressiveness most recently vented on Kuwait—which again should be seen as a welcome opportunity for a solution. Yet because it is structured by the Saudi alliance, American policy is

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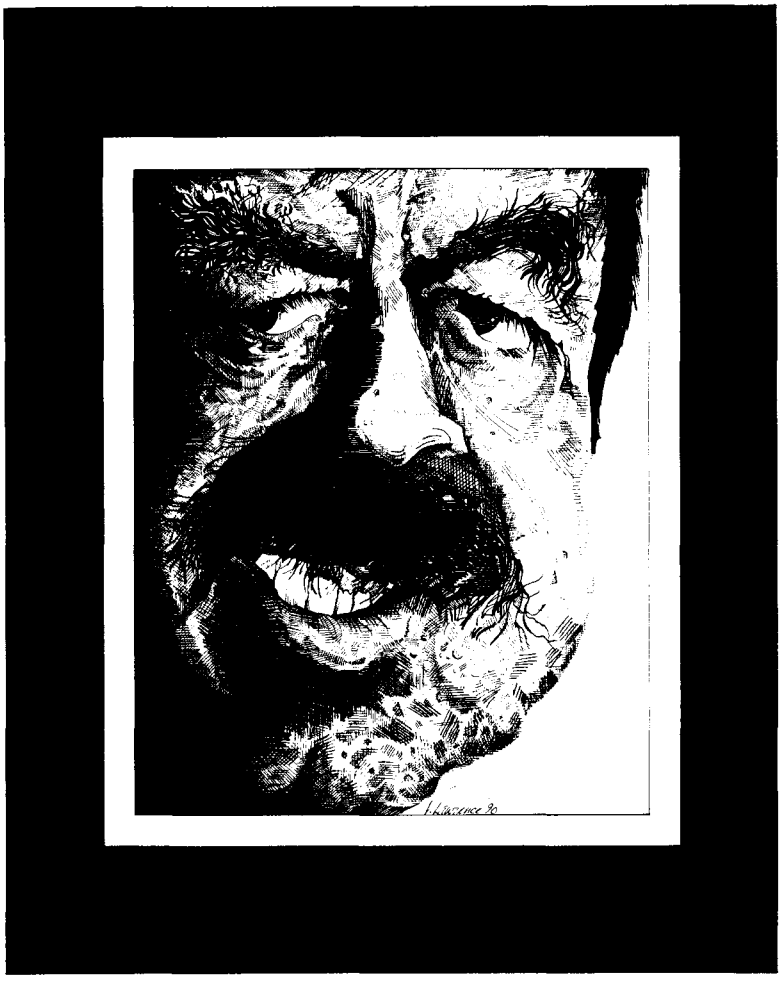
hinged on the goal of restoring the *status quo ante*, which includes not only the Kuwait regime that was, but also the Iraq regime that is. That would be equivalent to the successful dissuasion of Hitler in 1939, thereby perversely remedying the one defect of the Nazi military machine—the premature aggressiveness of its leader.

True, Bush has supplemented his formally declared goals—to defend Saudi Arabia and restore the Emir of Kuwait—with more or less casual suggestions that the Iraq regime must come to an end. That in itself should warn us. The seeds of disaster have been well planted when only the ultimately counterproductive goal of restoring the *status quo ante* can be formally declared, and the necessity of destroying Hussein's regime can only be mumbled. The broad anti-Iraqi coalition with all its Arab members is united only by this formal goal, setting the stage for diplomatic "solutions" that would leave the Hussein problem intact.

Moreover, the formal goal set the guidelines that are now allowing the U.S. armed forces to hijack the crisis for their own purposes. Faced with imminent and exceptionally large budget cuts, the Army and Navy have eagerly embraced the purely defensive formal goal to validate precisely the types of forces that the end of the cold war has made redundant. Before they were headed for the chopping block, but now they are headed for Saudi Arabia. The Army's armored and mechanized forces can play no offensive role against the vast defensive strength of the Iraqi army, but they are being enthusiastically proffered to man the siege lines of a prolonged defensive confrontation. The U.S. Navy is now sheltering in the Persian Gulf as many ships as it can, not to battle virtually navy-less Iraq, but to best protect them from the budget gale blowing from Capitol Hill. Even the Air Force, the relevant arm that can actually accomplish the purposeful goal, has its less relevant but more budget-threatened units crowding in, at the expense of its bombing capacity.



SADDAM HUSSEIN BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Not that there should be any bombing of Iraqi cities, regardless of the provocation; to do so would be cruel, politically disastrous, and strategically useless. To bomb Iraqi road, rail, or power "infrastructures"—let alone oil installations—would likewise kill many innocent Iraqis with uncertain effect (every precedent in this century suggests that dictatorships are actually strengthened by bombing). To bomb the huge, well-protected, and dispersed Iraqi army would be worse than useless, for any real success in weakening it would merely leave Iran free to threaten the region in turn. The valid targets—if Iraq opens fire at all—are quite different: the chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile production facilities, which are mostly felicitously remote from civilian populations.

Even if duly provoked by Iraqi military action, a bombing campaign amounts to a maximal escalation. Yet unless an improbable political upheaval in Baghdad transforms the situation, there may be no better alternative. Hussein's regime has now belatedly attracted worldwide condemnation. But it is as much because of its virtues as for its sins that decisive action is called for.

In the first place, the regime uniquely combines large oil revenues with a remarkable avoidance of extravagance and corruption. Each Saudi oil dollar is worth perhaps ten cents of civilian development or welfare, and hardly that when spent on military power. The rest pays for hordes of profligate princes (including the ambassador here in Washington, Prince Bandar, who seems to need thirty bedrooms in each of his mansions), enormous subsidies for an absurd agriculture (Saudi Arabia is self-sufficient in wheat—at ten times the world price), and a growing army of idle civil servants. And Saudi Arabia is not even the most wasteful of the oil exporters. Iraqi programs are by contrast quite austere, and foreign promoters who incautiously offer bribes end up in jail if they escape execution.

Second, Hussein's regime has trained thousands of

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competent managers and engineers during its twenty-two years, and most remarkable of all, it combines rife nepotism with sound management at the political level as well. Unaccountably, Hussein's nephews and in-laws seem to be an unusually efficient lot.

Third, Hussein's regime has focused its honesty and efficiency on a uniquely ambitious program of military accumulation far superior to that of its neighbors. Iraq is virtually self-sufficient in the final assembly or full production of many categories of weapons and most types of ammunition, and of course Hussein's program also includes the development of ballistic missiles of *all* ranges, a large output of chemical weapons, the preparation of biological agents, and, above all, the acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Fourth, in a world of improvisers and muddled pragmatists, Hussein has long pursued a coherent long-term strategy of his own. Well before he ventured into his premature war with Iran, Hussein's strategic goal was to make Iraq powerful enough to conquer and unify a large East Arab state that would include Syria and Jordan as well as all of the Arabian peninsula down to Oman, including Saudi Arabia. Because the United States was bound to be his plan's chief opponent, it has always been his main enemy, as W. Seth Carus has shown—even during the Iran war when Iraq received a great deal of indirect U.S. help. And because the United States could not ultimately be resisted without nuclear weapons, they were always essential to implement the plan, as they still are. By contrast, Israel was and is a mere side issue for Hussein, certainly a source of danger to the nuclear program especially, but also a useful focus of Arab solidarity.

Finally, Hussein's dictatorship has been effective enough to assure the stable control of Iraq required to implement his long-term strategy. There is much more to it than the extreme brutality of the repression. To be sure, Iraq is a police state of the familiar sort, with a secret police and the usual army of informers supplemented by the Baath party activists that reportedly watch every neighborhood and act as commissars in every military unit and civil office. But in addition, the regime's efficient repression is complemented by powerfully legitimizing qualities.

For all the priority given to military expenditures before, during, and since the Iran war, the population has received many benefits from Hussein's rule, including the impressive modernization of cities and towns, and the introduction of schools, health clinics, roads, and electricity even in remote rural areas. By all accounts, these services are mostly well-run (and incidentally employ many women in professional positions). Moreover, the victory over Iran—the first Arab military victory of modern times—has gained immense prestige for the regime, even though it was Hussein who had gratuitously started that enormously costly war. And last, his plan to unify the Arab East to create a powerful state centered on Iraq corresponds to all the aspirations of Arab nationalism, offers the only realistic remedy for the pervasive sense of powerlessness universally blamed on the present fragmentation of the region, and excites Iraq pride.

It is true that Hussein's Islamic credentials are dubious (his Baath party was the secular creation of a Christian as well as a Muslim nationalist), his Iran war brought death or mutilation into almost every Iraqi family, and his harsh oppression must be greatly resented. But a regime that withstood the extraordinary pressures of the Iran war (during which Khomeini repeatedly offered to stop the bloodshed in exchange for Hussein's head) cannot be regarded as fragile, and should prudently be given as many years as actuarians would give to its leader—as much as another twenty or so.

No crisis of recent times has raised such large questions, including the urgency of taking advantage of the new era of Soviet-Western cooperation to establish very strict controls on international arms sales—and not only American and Soviet arms sales. If China must be further appeased or Brazil compensated, so be it: both are worth it to achieve a belated disarmament of the world's most dangerous region. After all, Europe itself can hardly be disarmed if its Middle Eastern neighbors continue to build up their military strength. This principle must apply in spades to the control of the technology exports that, regardless of their ostensibly non-military character, end up in chemical, missile, and nuclear programs. We can no longer be paralyzed by the "dual use" problem. To avoid chemical, biological, and nuclear mayhem, it is surely justifiable to inhibit some narrow forms of industrialization.

A still larger question is raised once again by the role of oil in the U.S. and world economy. It must finally be recognized what is entailed by the dependence of the world economy on Middle East oil exports: a constant readiness to assert military control over the oil fields of Arabia, protectively or otherwise. The costs and risks of the energy alternatives from nuclear power to conservation should be evaluated accordingly, and not one by one against abstract ecological, safety, or economic standards unrelated to total energy needs.

The Bush administration has been equally remarkable for its day-to-day competence and its refusal to admit that policy-making requires more than day-to-day management. Hence one cannot be too hopeful of its readiness to confront either the arms control or the energy questions, which call for broad, coherent, and sustained policies. But there is one necessity that even the most short-term pragmatists must recognize as ineluctable. By means political or military, by action local or external, Hussein's scientific-industrial program of nuclear and missile acquisition must be stopped before it is too late. To now "diffuse" the crisis by diplomatic means, leaving the laboratories, plants, storage sites, and ready weapons intact in their dozens of remote desert installations, would set the stage for a product-improved Kuwait II, by a still stronger Iraq armed with nuclear weapons. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Doing the Dubious Thing

Spike Lee's new film, **Mo' Better Blues** (Universal), is a disappointment. It's disjointed, overwrought, and, despite an air of long-delayed truth-telling, it's stale. This picture is something worse than a fluctuation in his career, as was his second one, *School Daze*, the sort of wavering that can nag any artist's work en route. *Mo' Better Blues* is disappointing in ways that must worry the enthusiasts (like me) for *She's Gotta Have It!* and *Do the Right Thing*. Lee, to quote the old theater line, has believed his reviews: he believes (apparently) that he can now spin off whatever he likes and that the world must accept it because he is celebrated, much discussed, a box-office hit, and, saddest of all, because he is black.

This is the story of a jazz trumpeter, played, as well as is possible, by Denzel Washington. We first glimpse the character as a boy, in Brooklyn, 1969, forced to practice the trumpet by his parents when he would rather be out playing baseball. Then we flash forward to the man, playing trumpet with his own group in a crowded club. The plot concerns his dalliance with two women and his friendship with his group's manager, played by Lee. The manager gets into gambling-debt trouble and is being beaten up by hoods in an alley outside the club when Washington comes to his rescue. The hoods turn on the rescuer and beat him so badly—with his trumpet—that he can't play for a year.

He comes back, makes a brief reappearance with a new group headed by one of his former band, a group that features one of his two former girlfriends as a singer. Then he walks—through the rain, without the raincoat he was wearing a few minutes earlier—to the home of his other girlfriend; talks her into taking him back though he has treated her badly; marries her; and has a son. The son grows up sufficiently fast so that the film can end with a reprise of the opening scene: a boy being forced to practice the trumpet though he'd rather be out playing ball.

The trouble with the synopsis above is that it makes the story sound coherent. It is not: it is full of patches, snags, and awkward jumps. But if it *were* coherent, what would it be? Simply the all-black version of the jazz film, more or less standard, that we have been seeing since the beginning of the sound era: the musician who is determined to do his thing no matter how the world tries to impede him; who, for one reason or another, hits bottom; and who finds his way back, usually through the help of a good woman. The first shock in the film is that Lee had any interest in this worn pattern.

The second is that he did it so errantly and flabbily. (I anticipate that some will tell us that Lee knew what he was doing, that his picture is really a put-on of the trite jazz pictures of the past.) The third shock is that he seems to justify what he has done, according to his statements and inferably in the picture itself, on the ground that he is the first black filmmaker to deal with this subject in a full-length fiction film. (He wrote, directed, and produced.) We are to think that we are seeing the subject treated with an authenticity it has lacked up to now.

This contention is furthered in a book—of the same title—published by Simon and Schuster, which contains the screenplay, much comment by Lee, and a foreword by Donald Bogle, the black film historian. Bogle summarizes the history of American jazz films, then says that audiences

> will find the differences between this film and past jazz dramas striking. For here we have a jazz film from a fresh perspective: that of a young African American filmmaker, who responds to jazz's rhythms, moods, and textures—and who understands the place of the jazz hero within the consciousness of the Black community. . . . No doubt what will be most exciting and invigorating for the Black audience (and let us hope for the White audience, too) is the way the film captures the Black community's vitality and diversity.

I don't of course pretend to know what the black community will feel, but this white observer felt he learned more about that community from Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* thirty years ago, not to mention Lee's *Do the Right Thing* last year, than from this film; and more about black jazz musicians from Wilson's play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* five years ago.

As for Lee's "fresh perspective," all I could see was a successful director exploiting his new eminence willfully: using slow-motion pointlessly; using whiplash sweeps from face to face in a dialogue (instead of cutting) for no reason; using—twice—the device of having his subject(s) move with the camera in a 360 degree turn, instead of moving the camera around the subject(s); and some other film-school high jinks, all inorganic and

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Ariel. *Introduces a gifted Finnish director, Aki Kaurismäki, with a really black comedy about a young drifter in Helsinki. It's especially for those who like Jim Jarmusch. (Reviewed 8/20&27/90)* **Pretty Woman.** *Pygmalion up to date—this time an LA hooker and a visiting tycoon. Julia Roberts and Richard Gere make this piffle very entertaining. (4/16/90)* **Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!** *Not Pedro Almodóvar's most outrageous, but this tale of a Madrid porno star and her loving abductor sizzles cunningly. (5/14/90)* **Without *You* I'm Nothing.** *Sandra Bernhard's club act has been made into a film, not just a filmed act. It's full of other surprises, too, intelligent, witty, sharp. (7/2/90)* **—SK**

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obtrusive. There are cinematic clichés: the hero's bareheaded walk in the rain, the hero playing his trumpet alone at night on Brooklyn Bridge. (These days? At night? In an expensive camel's-hair coat? He'd never get to the end of the bridge with that coat or his trumpet.)

The dialogue often flows, but sometimes it goes rigid. At one point Washington says to one of his women: "How many times do I have to tell you that I have a certain amount of hours allotted to practice daily? You know my program, yet you consistently overlook it." You can *hear* the typewriter in such lines. (The best-written scenes are the ones between the two crooked white brothers who own the club, played by two brothers, John and Nicholas Turturro.) A few of the scenes make no sense. For instance, Washington complains bitterly that black people (he says "niggers") don't come to hear his music when, as we've seen, every one of his packed houses has been 99 percent black.

Then there's the cinematography, which demonstrates that a big budget hasn't done Lee's taste much good. With Ernest Dickerson, who has shot all of Lee's features, he has plotted visual effects so overladen with color, so tremulous with mistiness, so eager to be pretty, that the effect is more glutton than gourmet. The force of the Lee-Dickerson collaboration in *Do the Right Thing* is gone, the sense of a size much larger than the American film world usually provides.

The acting is smooth, including Lee's performance, with one uncomfortable exception. Joie Lee, Spike's sister, who played his sister competently in his last film, here is one of Washington's two loves and is inadequate, especially in comparison with the other woman, Cynda Williams. ("Mo' better," I should note, is a phrase used in the film for sex—doing the mo' better.) Robin Harris, who was so taking as the leader of the sidewalk trio in the last film, is equally taking here as a stand-up comic. Harris died, at thirty-six, since this picture was finished; it's dedicated to him. •

A critic's notebook.

History and the Novel

By Irving Howe

I.

Defoe's Moll Flanders fears that she will sink into London's depths; Balzac's Lucien races toward fame and fortune; Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov murders at least partly for money; Joyce's Bloom sells advertisements for a newspaper. Except for Moll, these fictional characters also cherish high motives and grand delusions, yet they are constrained by commonplace necessity. They must find a way to earn a living, they are pressed by circumstances quite as most of us are in reality. No such pressures, however, beset Aeneas, Tristan, or Faust—not even the most literal-minded reader can ever have worried about their finances.

In the novel there is no "once upon a time . . ." There is London in the 1840s, Moscow in the 1950s. The clock rules; place helps determine psychic formation; characters reach identity through social role. In the novel a complex of circumstances often emerges as a "slice" of time across the passage of history, since an illusion of historical stoppage is essential for that "thickness" of specification at which many novels aim: Chicago as it looked upon Sister Carrie's arrival, Paris seen through the eyes of Swann.

But the illusion of historical stoppage must also be linked to an illusion of historical flow. How this is done we hardly know, it is a secret of genius. A fictional "world," say, Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County, is portrayed at more-or-less stationary points, yet the very act of so conceiving it promotes the illusion of historical motion, somewhat the way a series of stills can result in a moving picture. Social circumstance melts into historical process.

II.

Novelists write on the tacit premise of the self-sufficiency of history, the cosmic solitariness of mankind. Beneath heaven's "indifferent blue" we are now freed from the decrees of any external will, as the glow of faith is replaced by the hard light of causality.

It was deism that taught us to accept the pain of historicity. By granting God powers of initiation and then putting him to sleep forever, deism freed the mind from the puzzle of origins and cleared the way for historical consciousness. Without such a tacit premise, the novel could not have gotten very far, since it really has no room for a will superior to natural law. True, great novels have been written by devout Christians, but as writers they were something more or less than devout Christians.

In wrenching free from the dualisms of Christianity, modern novelists improvised historical dualisms of their own. Soon after the Enlightenment, the problem confronting the novelistic imagination was not only the gloom of being distanced from heaven; it was also the pain of estrangement from a society taken to be at least as indifferent to men and women as the cosmos was now recognized to be. In many nineteenth-century novels, society figures as more than the sum of its members. It takes on what we call "a life of its own," and that life is not ours, certainly not the portion of life that we cherish most. Society now hovers over mankind like a crushing weight, sometimes with a willful malevolence. It's notable that conflicting visions of society bear a curious similarity to conflicting visions of God—and, for that matter, of God's disappearance. Remove the idea of a wrathful or a loving God, and the distance from a neutral to a malevolent cosmos is not very great. Remove the idea of a naturally ordained social hierarchy, and the distance from a neutral to a malevolent social order is even smaller.

III.

A parallel development can be noticed, I think, with regard to the idea of the self. As a historically liberating hypothesis advanced during the Enlightenment and the age of Romanticism, the self becomes a shadow of our public lives, created within the modern historical moment while often turning upon it as a critical adversary. The self comes to be treasured as a reserve of consciousness, a resource beyond the press of social forms. The child of history, it erects a defense against the assaults of history. The very assumption that we can locate a psychic presence that we call the self, or that it is useful to suppose such a presence exists, implies a separation of inner being from outer behavior—what might be called the dualism of the person.

With time, the notion of the self becomes frayed, breaking into fragments of dissociation and estrangement. In Beck-

Irving Howe is at work on a book about the novel titled *Selected Short Subjects*.

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ett's novels and plays it ends as a state of nullity, the self erased or reduced to waiting. Perhaps it's a simplification to see the history of the novel—or historical consciousness working through the novel—as a two-sided confrontation with demons of estrangement: those that bear down from without and those that surge up from within. With Kafka, this distinction collapses.

IV.

The historicity of the novel, wrote Georg Lukacs, is shown in its "derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarities of their age." Versions of morality, styles of sexual behavior, tokens of psychic anxiety: such elements of fictional characterization are shaped by the moment of composition as well as by the individual sensibility that conforms to, or rebels against, that moment. George Eliot's Dorothea strains toward a "heroic" surmounting of circumstance, but not only does circumstance limit her choice of vocation, the very notion she holds of what a heroic aspiration should be is itself flattened out by the circumstances of her life. By now Turgenev's Bazarov may represent the generic figure of the thwarted rebel, but to gain this status he had first to be deployed as a narrow-minded positivist of a kind that flourished in mid-nineteenth-century Russia. Nor are they ready-made characters "placed" against a given or fixed historical background; they emerge out of the writer's historical awareness, out of a sense of a lived moment. The characters come, so to say, from the writer-in-history.

But only out of historical awareness? Of course not. Individual natures, visions, idiosyncrasies all play a part. Only as a convenience of discourse can we distinguish the historical from the individual. Still, the novel rests on the assumption that man is a consequence of himself, the outcome of a self-initiated activity over stretches of time. And woman, too. The novel thereby refuses, or at least minimizes the claims of, a belief in unalterable human nature.

Ortega y Gasset, in a famous sentence, remarks that "man has no nature; what he has is . . . a history." This is a powerful overstatement. Even if man has only a history, there are constants and continuities within that history that might well come, in their accumulation, to be something like a fixed nature. In the absence of such constants and continuities, we would be unable to make out fictional characters with any degree of intelligibility. So it might be better to say: man has no unchanging nature; what his nature does have is . . . a history. And in most or much fiction, such an assumption prevails.

Most novelists, I'm sure, never bothered their heads about this, but felt their way empirically, sentence by sentence, character by character. But what about those who did hold to an idea of immutable human nature? We can only speculate. Insofar as novelists like Fielding held to a classical view of a fixed human nature, this had to make itself felt, of course, in their work, and many novels bear the imprint of worldviews inherited from both classical Christianity and earlier literary genres (*Tom Jones*, for instance). Yet the fact that a novelist deliberately and frequently wrote out of a conscious belief in immutable human traits—especially useful, by the way, in comedy, where it allows a stable repertoire of habit—does not at all mean that his work is untouched by the signs of history. Again, *Tom Jones*: Fielding's organizing conception of human nature may be suprahistorical, but his treatment of Squire Western and Lady Bellaston reflects an acute historical consciousness. Fielding may see them as universal types, and so they are, but we also see them as peculiarly situated in a specific moment of English life. Even what a writer like Fielding takes to be an immutable human trait may itself be marked by historical mutability.

V.

One of the things we expect from novels is that they answer the question put by Trollope's title *How We Live Now*. Daily existence, with its scatter of contingencies and exhaustion of energies, preoccupies not only the realists; it absorbs even novelists like Proust who reach toward philosophical scope, or those like Lawrence who search for deeper grounds of existence. And also a writer like Beckett, whose bubbling nausea has a source in dailiness.

Still, we ought not to think of history as a tyrant imposing itself, as if from necessity, upon every novel within reach. As history seeps into the novel, it becomes transformed into something else, into what might be called history-in-the-novel. Nor does history make itself felt simply as a reproduction of the familiar world. For many acceptable novels a sort of moderate mimesis is sufficient, the kind about which we say, "Well, it gives a pretty faithful picture of life in Oklahoma during the Depression years." Still, as modern readers we have come to expect more. Accurate representation seems no longer enough, if only because journalism claims—or pretends—to offer as much. At least since the late nineteenth century we have imposed an enormous cultural burden upon the novel, coming to think of it as an agency of moral criticism, and more remarkably as a creator of values. *How We Live* becomes *How Should We Live?*—and then, *Can We Live?*

During its two greatest periods—the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—the novel maintained a deeply critical relation, even a subversive relation, to the social milieu in which it thrived. (Is literature "ungrateful," does it bite the hand that feeds it? Perhaps so; but that hand needs an occasional sharp bite, and anyway it does many other things than feed.) What gets "swept" into the novel are not just depictions of how we live now; it also draws upon the line of critical thought, the fund of literary allusions, the play of street sentiment, and sometimes the ideology of revolt. Look, even, at the work of such unrebellious novelists as Thackeray and Trollope, and you will see that there is more in it than acquiescence to standard Victorian precepts. There is also a subterranean critical ferment, sometimes beyond the writer's intention. Once past the sorts of novels written for amusement or shock, a representation of life can rarely be separated from a criticism of values.

Is this true only for the modern epoch, so ruthless in its self-perceptions? I think not. Something about mimesis, the effort honestly to evoke a portion of shared experience, seems to mandate criticism. And probably there is no such thing as a mere record or "slice" of life, since all representations imply perspective and perspective entails criticism, though not necessarily of a type to satisfy critics of a particular kind or moment.

VI.

When you read a novel with a strong political-historical slant, you are faced with the delicate problem of balancing social rhetoric and imaginative representation. In certain novels by Dostoyevsky, Stendhal, and Conrad, the two can hardly be separated, so that there follows among critics, as Joseph Frank remarks, "quarrels over the validity of the images of social life created by novelists." Works like *The Possessed*, *The Red and the Black*, and *Nostromo* stir deep passions, which make a pure or disinterested literary judgment very hard.

In an essay about *The Possessed*, Frank draws upon an extensive knowledge of Russian culture to argue against critics like Philip Rahv and me, who greatly admire Dostoyevsky's novel, recognize that it scores some hits against leftist dogmatism, and still believe that its attack upon Russian radicalism constitutes, on the

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whole, a historical distortion. Frank argues that Dostoyevsky "does not transgress the bounds of verisimilitude" in *The Possessed*; it follows closely the career of the infamous Nechaev, the nineteenth-century Russian adventurer-revolutionary of iron will and terrorist deceit. Dostoyevsky, continues Frank:

> has been charged with giving a misleading picture . . . of the Russian radical movement as a whole. Nechaev was incontestably an isolated phenomenon among the radical groups of the 1860s, and his systematic Machiavellianism was alien to the other major organizations of the radical intelligentsia. . . . In point of fact . . . Dostoyevsky never tried to give any other impression.

One critic's "point of fact," however, may clash with another's "impression." I would argue that by populating his radical group with scoundrels and buffoons, and by employing a style of searing ridicule in his treatment of them (laced though it is with a subterranean feeling of kinship), Dostoyevsky *had* to leave another "impression." He was after bigger game than just the little Nechaev group. He was intent upon showing that the murderous buffoonery, the "systematic Machiavellianism" of Peter Verkhovensky (the fictional double of Nechaev), is inherent in or a logical extension of the more humane and rational brands of radicalism. He wanted the part to be seen as representing the whole.

If, as Frank writes, Dostoyevsky acknowledged that the circle around Peter Verkhovensky was merely "an isolated phenomenon among the radical groups of the 1860s," and if indeed this acknowledgment informed the plot of *The Possessed*, then not only would his novel lose its claim to representativeness, it would shrink into an extended anecdote about a strange fanatic. But *The Possessed* does advance, as any serious novel must, a strong claim to some degree of representativeness, what I'd call a sort of "potential verisimilitude," one in which the story is taken to form an anticipation of things to come.

So there is a disagreement here. To certain kinds of critics the disagreement would be profoundly uninteresting, since they do not regard verisimilitude as a significant factor in the criticism of fiction. But Frank and I do; we both respond to the heavy breath of history upon Dostoyevsky's work. Where we disagree is in estimating the specific relationship between historical event and Dostoyevsky's rendering of it. For my present purposes, it hardly matters which, if either, of us is right, since what interests me here is in trying to locate a critical problem.

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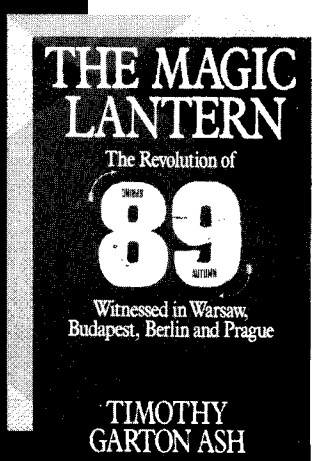

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We can read works of literature touching on the politics of a distant time in a relaxed fashion: Who feels strongly about, or quite remembers, Dante's politics? But novels that evoke our deepest biases, as *The Possessed* still can, make the act of reading into a moral risk, entailing what critics of a few decades ago used to call "the problem of belief." (For readers without beliefs, of course, there is no problem.) Readers with strong political opinions are likely to find that in responding to a novel like *The Possessed*, it is all but impossible to separate ideological sentiments from literary judgments, for they read as whole persons, with a rush of feeling and idea that is stronger than any recognition of the book's local verisimilitude.

Let us suppose, then, that Frank and I, sharing a high estimate of *The Possessed*, are not very far apart in our political views. How are we to explain the differences between us? He believes that, in demonstrating the faithfulness of the novel to the actual experience of Nechaev, he has also demonstrated that "the usual accusations against Dostoyevsky [regarding the historical implication of the novel] must be qualified," while I believe that together with brilliant insights Dostoyevsky offered brilliant distortions. My admiration will probably turn out to be more qualified or uneasy than Frank's.

Can we be certain, however, whether these differences are due to political assumptions or literary valuations? Do we really know how to distinguish between them? The one thing that seems reasonably clear is that I respond more intensely to Dostoyevsky's ideological intent than does Frank. But that of course does not mean that I respond more accurately.

I am left with a severe problem (some would say, a confusion). How can you say that *The Possessed* is both a great work of literature and also a work that offers a distorted, even malicious treatment of its subject? I am not at all sure how to answer this question: perhaps by recognizing that the imperatives of literature and history can be at deep variance. In any case, I am entangled in this difficulty, and the tangle is exactly where I want to remain, since I believe it is faithful to the actual experience of reading such novels.

VII.

"Ah," cries an impatient voice, "history, yes, but what about the eternal themes, those recurrent human experiences, those overarching myths that, as Collingwood once wrote, tell readers 'the secrets of their own hearts,' themes like love and death, innocence and experience, goodness and evil, themes linking Helen and Paris to Anna and Vronsky, perhaps to Lily Bart and Selden? Are not these the abiding concerns of literature, reducing to a quite secondary level all reflected changes of historical circumstance? Do we read Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* for his knowledge of hotels, or for his ability to enter the sadly yearning heart of Clyde Griffith? And what about the archetypal characters through whom the abiding myths are dramatized, do they not survive—Oedipus and Quixote, Clarissa Harlowe and Tess—even into the age of the computer?"

Well, yes; but the point is that if you strip them to bareness, the eternal themes come to seem commonplace, even boring. To affect us, they must take on flesh that will decay, be located in houses that will crumble. Eternity lodges in the temporal. Here is an illuminating passage by William Troy about the scene in Zola's *Germinal* in which Etienne and Catherine are trapped in the mine:

> It brings us back to an atmosphere and a meaning at least as old as the story of Orpheus and Eurydice. For what is the mine itself but a reintegration of the Hades-Hell symbol? The immediate and particular social situation is contained within the larger pattern of a universal recrudescence . . .

I would prefer to say that the "larger pattern" can be fully realized only through "the immediate and particular social situation," that is, that the "Hades-Hell symbol" reaches universality only through the graphic rendering of the mine. But no matter; in Troy's phrasing or in mine, the central position of social circumstance is clear.

Even powerful archetypes get worn down by the workings of time. A few—Oedipus, Hamlet, Faust—do seem to survive a range of historical situations, in part because we assign changing meanings to them. But Tristan: Does he still exert (except perhaps in Wagner's opera) the imaginative hold he once did? As for Richardson's Clarissa, that spotless exemplar of maidenhood, she has surely lost a good part of her authority. And even Oedipus had to be reinvented by Freud in order to maintain his status as archetype.

If we turn to a more modest variety, the sort for which we claim not universal scope but a large role in a particular culture, we find that these can fade quickly. Sinclair Lewis's Babbitt was elevated a few decades ago to a proper noun in the American language, so representative did he seem of petit bourgeois philistinism. Now Lewis's novel is little read, and Babbitt almost forgotten, the name familiar only to the elderly. Archetypes die, too.

VIII.

Simply because it is what it is, the novel can never quite free itself from the shaping pressures of history; but with some novels, history is more than a mere felt presence, it is an all but completely dominant force.

Stendhal, a latecomer in the line of the French Revolution, writes out of an explicit recognition of historical disadvantage. The Revolution has been traduced; liberalism has suffered rout. For people like himself, who admired Napoleon but refused his tyranny, there is nothing to do but wait. In *The Red and the Black* Julien Sorel strains against the confines of history, tries to escape through cunning and ruse, succumbs to values he had despised, and by way of concluding gesture, offers his head in payment. History comes here to form an accumulation of all the rubbish of a detested past as it defiles the present. History batters the spirit, stamps out spontaneity.

Far more oblique, occasionally as farce tinged with a dry sadness, is Stendhal's still greater novel *The Charterhouse of Parma*. Once its protagonist Fabrizio has left the battlefield of Waterloo and come to the mean little duchy of Parma, the story may seem to be some distance from the gross historical pressures weighing upon Julien Sorel. In *The Charterhouse of Parma* the central trio—the worldly politician Mosca, the grand Duchess Sanseverina, the innocently guileful Fabrizio—must live by personal relations, because personal relations are all that history allows in the post-Napoleonic moment. Yet their sense of the skimpiness of a life focused entirely upon personal relations itself is a mark left by history. They have known something better. Now they must submit to the authority of a comic-opera despot and a shriveled church. Resisting as best they can, they try to live out the Nietzschian prescription of "objection, evasion, joyous distrust, and irony," but history is not to be cheated so easily.

In 1908 the young Trotsky confronts Leo Tolstoy with a mixture of admiration and disapproval: "To history [he] grants no recognition; and this provides the basis for all his thinking." A keen remark, but not really accurate; as Isaiah Berlin showed in *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, it's not history as such, but all intellectual formulation claiming to possess a key to history, to which Tolstoy "grants no recognition." Berlin speaks of

> Tolstoy's violently unhistorical and indeed antihistorical rejection of all efforts to explain or justify human actions or charac-

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ters in terms of social or individual growth, or "roots" in the past; this side by side with an absorbed and lifelong interest in history.

For Tolstoy, adds Berlin, "history does not reveal causes; it presents only a blank succession of unexplained events." Tolstoy alternated between the hedgehog's search for a "single embracing vision" and the fox's "actual experience of actual men and women in their relation to one another and to an actual, three-dimensional, empirically experienced physical environment."

Yet there is no major novel of the last two centuries in which the experience of history—history as pressure, burden, encompassing atmosphere—is so strongly felt as in *War and Peace*: the very same history that Tolstoy believed to be devoid of rational structure or progressive development. History is *there* in all its abundance, felt in Kutuzov's fatalistic submission to the course of battle, in Pierre's epiphany upon being captured by the French, in Prince Andrei's discovery when wounded that "everything is empty, everything is a delusion except this infinite sky," even in Natasha's single-minded absorption in domesticity.

If one can say with Tolstoy that history is the impenetrable sequence of human experience—that is, history is everything—and being impenetrable, that it cannot order that experience—that is, history is nothing—then one can conclude that in *War and Peace* history is nonetheless everywhere visible as guide and dynamic in the conduct of his characters. The theorist of antihistory becomes the great portraitist of historical shaping. (He also involves himself in some amusing contradictions. Kutuzov is said to be superior to Napoleon because he, Kutuzov, knows that the course of battle cannot be determined in advance—which is to say, that in denying historical determinism Kutuzov understands the history to which Tolstoy had denied rational order.)

The hedgehog searches and the fox portrays, but what the fox portrays is enabled, is provided for, by the hedgehog's search. It is Tolstoy's supreme achievement that, like Stendhal before him, each of his depictions of personal life bears the impress of historical consciousness, with the two quite as inseparable in his fiction as we take them to be in our life.

In García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the elemental life cycles of a Central American country—the haughty decorums and sensualities by which people in the town of Macondo try to relieve the barrenness of their existence—become a power, a salvage that the sterile official history of the country, that sequence of revolutions and coups d'état, cannot quite destroy. García Márquez wishes to capture all that gradually slips out of memory and can perhaps be regained only through myth: he wishes to preserve the subhistorical "history" of his people as they try to preserve themselves in the midst of an endless civil war.

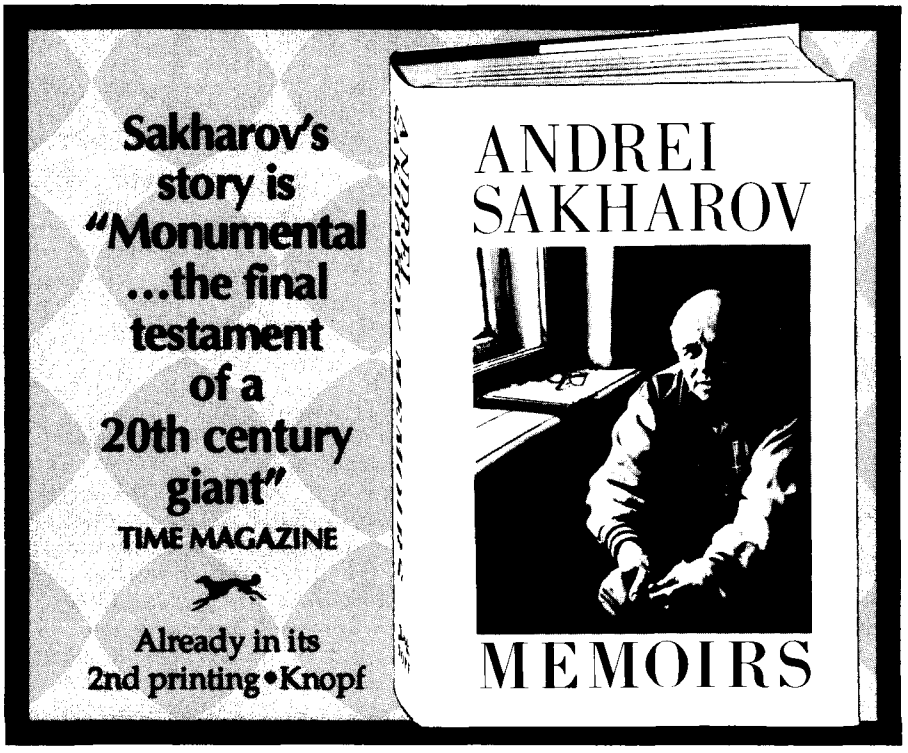
By itself the fabulous narrative of the rise and fall of the Buenda family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* might come to seem a grandiose evasion, falsely upbeat, a sort of Central American operetta; but what gives this novel its quotient of ferocity is the repeated intrusion of the sterile official history, the often ridiculous politics and civil wars of the country so self-absorbed in its blood and waste as to point up the meaning of García Márquez's title. The sterile official history is juxtaposed to the fertile subhistorical myth, as a sort of comic transcendence. The matriarch who dominates a good part of the novel feels that "time was not passing . . . but it was turning in a circle." The circle of generations and of solitude.

IX.

I come to a disconcerting conclusion. History may be the rock on which the novel rests, but time crumbles that rock into grains of sand. The circumstances forming the matrix of fiction soon turn out to be inaccessible, distant, perhaps no longer arresting; come to seem alloyed by values we can no longer credit; or decline into mere reflexes of social bias.

Mansfield Park, the one novel by Jane Austen that her admirers find troubling, was the subject of an influential essay some years ago by Lionel Trilling, in which he made a case for this most conservative and least lively of Austen's works. Trilling confronted head-on a problem that disturbs modern readers: that when Sir Thomas, head of a solid family in the landed gentry, leaves for the West Indies, his children and their friends decide to amuse themselves by producing an amateur theatrical, and that this project, which to us must seem the height of innocence, comes to be an occasion for moral uneasiness. The characters of firmer or traditional morality, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram, express grave doubts at the propriety of dramatic impersonation, and Trilling persuasively explains why, in the circumstances, the amateur theatrical could be seen as morally dubious. Not many readers would today "agree" with Sir Thomas's portentous statement that "such a scheme" is marked by "impropriety," but at least we learn to give it enough conditional assent so that the business of the amateur theatrical does not interfere with our enjoyment of the novel.

But there is another historical fact that may cause even greater uneasiness. Sir Thomas, though subject to moral criticism by Austen because of his imperceptive rigidity, is still shown as a respected patriarch. His visit to the West Indies on behalf of his estate occurs at a time when slavery dominated those islands, which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means that it is close to a certainty that he was an owner of slaves. Now this occasioned neither criticism from Austen nor comment from Trilling; but it is a serious ground for those discomforts that the passage of time, the flow of history, can cause in the reading of even great or near-great novels.

One common defense of Austen is that the working of the West Indian estate is not central to the action of *Mansfield Park*; and then we have to make discounts, too, for an earlier time, as later times will for ours. In my years as a teacher I would offer this defense to students, but now I wonder. Austen could have sent Sir Thomas on plenty of other trips. The only requirement of the plot was to get him away from home. Yet, with the deliberateness that marks all her work, she clearly meant to write as she did: Sir Thomas profits from the exploitation of black labor and is nevertheless seen as a morally upright if somewhat unimaginative figure. Now I do not mean to suggest that Austen approved of slavery; but she could assign the patriarchal Sir Thomas a plantation in Antigua without it causing her any visible moral uneasiness in the evaluation of his character. I find this much more troubling than the amateur theatricals, which I am content to accept as a convenience of plot.

The kind of problems presented by *Mansfield Park* can be found in many novels of the past. What can we "do" about them? Seek to accommodate ourselves, or make allowances, or offer partially negative judgments. If we are very sophisticated, we tell ourselves that in reading a novel of the past (and the not-so-distant past: say, Rousseau's *Julie* or Fielding's *Amelia*), we ought to have enough "historical imagination" to enter unfamiliar settings and recognize the integrity of other moralities. And we should also make it our business, of course, to learn about distant historical situations: say, those of Manzoni's *The Betrothed* or Cooper's Leatherstocking tales. We should be able to understand, even if not share, the obsession with virginity that courses through Richardson's *Clarissa*—but see how I betray myself, since the very word "obsession" evinces a bias.

It's a splendid thing, this historical imagination, and everyone needs a supply of it, but the mere fact that we need to invoke it testifies to difficulties. We can no longer read some of these novels with a direct, spontaneous response. There must now be a complex act of "mediation" that entails all sorts of mental reserves. By contrast, nothing of the sort is required if we pick up Elsa Morante's *History*, at least nothing for any literate person over fifty. But for a twenty-year-old to whom the Second World War is almost as distant as the French and Indian War? And fifty years from now: introduction, footnotes, chronological table ("The Second World War, which forms the background to Elsa Morante's novel, broke out in 1939, when . . .").

X.

History makes, history unmakes, the novel. And this is true even for novels we love. It is profoundly disconcerting to see them slowly drained of their original power.

In the 1930s *The Sun Also Rises* was a work that many readers felt close to. We may have been irked by Hemingway's anti-intellectualism, or have scorned his macho posturing, and we certainly knew ourselves to be at a distance from his Parisian expatriates. And yet we felt that Hemingway expressed, through this story of lostness and its sad repressed language, a disenchantment that we had inherited from the generation caught up in the First World War. Even if his notion of a "secret community" surviving historical disaster had a self-dramatizing aspect, it still related to our feelings of plight. There is more than one kind of "secret community."

In later years I still found *The Sun Also Rises* a deeply affecting novel, but by the late 1970s a dismaying change of response began to show itself among my students. They found the milieu of the novel merely exotic; they saw its stylizations as an affectation, and its tone—this was the worst of all—as self-pitying. A gap had opened between generations, so that the very novel that history had, so to say, pressed against our hearts had now fallen victim to history.

The decades have passed, these writers have died, and even those of us especially fond of, say, Ignazio Silone know that a work of such moral poise as *Bread and Wine* is not likely to stir younger readers as it once stirred readers of my generation. If a few young people do open *Darkness at Noon*, a novel that roused violent argument when it first appeared, they may need explanatory notes about the Moscow trials. When was it that you said the Moscow trials took place? This fascism mentioned in Silone's *Fontamara*—what was that again? Should anyone remember? And isn't it wonderful that we have survived all these catastrophes? Yes, it's wonderful, but one's heart also sinks before the ravages of time, before the sheer sadness of the costs. •

The Obscene House

BY TOMAS VENCLOVA

Inside the Soviet Writers' Union by John and Carol Garrard

(The Free Press, 303 pp., $22.95)

Fifteen to twenty years ago, young Soviet literati, myself included, loved to play a game. You would take a copy of the *List of Members of the Soviet Writers' Union*, a thick hardcover book available only to the happy few, open it at random, and look through the first two pages that appeared before your eyes. If you found a writer you were aware of (if you could mention, for example, the titles of his or her books), you got a point; and if you knew the writer personally, you got five points. Then you had to pass the book to the next player, who repeated the process. The first person to collect twenty-one points was the winner. The game usually lasted several hours, since the book was lousy with hundreds of Abdurakhmanovs and Zynziverovs who made their living (a comfortable one) by pen or typewriter but were totally obscure. From time to time, you stumbled upon something genuinely strange, say, an author with the fine oxymoronic name Sholokhov-Sinyavsky. Only rarely would a real writer—not good or bad, but *real*—be encountered in the desert of nonentities. If you came across your own name, you were immediately disqualified. We considered membership in the Writers' Union a form of infamy.

In the West, too, there are lots of graphomaniacs and writers unknown beyond the closest circle of their relatives and friends. But they do not form a privileged caste, and they usually support themselves by other than literary means. In the Soviet Union, the situation has been entirely different. The Writers'

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Union is virtually a branch of the *nomenklatura*, that is, of the Soviet ruling class. In return for support of the status quo, the Union shelters nonentities and guarantees their proliferation by giving them a steady source of income, personal security, prestige, and self-esteem.

This book provides valuable insights into this most characteristic vestige of Stalinist cultural politics. The Garrards' work is almost a scholarly treatise; it is based on meticulous research, considerable personal experience, and interviews with a motley crowd of people, from apologetic officials to disdainful émigrés. The style of the book is appropriately dry, though it is often enlivened by sparks of irony. The Garrards present the facts, without much moralizing or evaluation, sometimes to the point of boredom. The relations and the differences between Goskomizdat, Goskompechat, and similar bureaucratic bodies with unholy names will probably interest only the most intrepid Sovietologists. Still, the book presents a good picture of an organization bound by bizarre rituals, torn by petty rivalries, and consumed by vulgar greed, and unique for its very dullness.

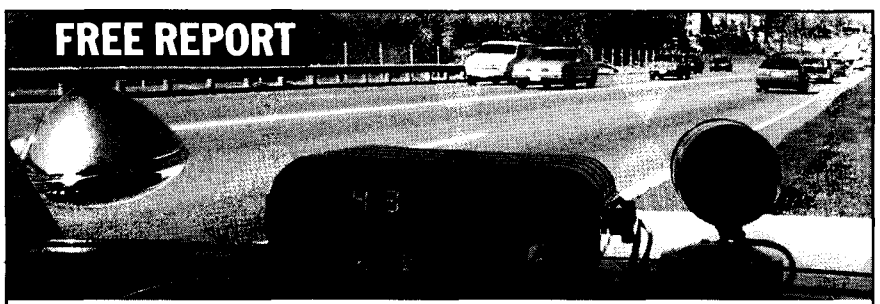
Not without reason, the Garrards consider the story of the Soviet Writers' Union "the most extensive and longest-running cultural experiment in any major society since the Middle Ages." They state that this experiment has "much interest for a social scientist." It is interesting for a teratologist, too. The roots of the experiment, only partially traced by the Garrards, are deep. The Greeks, who created concepts of individualism and disinterested beauty, were also inclined to consider art an educating power. The highest vocation of art, the final embodiment of its freedom, was its service to the enlightened state of Pericles or Alexander; and the aesthetic results of this approach were far from disappointing. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance—I am generalizing unforgivably, so that I may bring the story quickly to Lenin—developed their own mechanisms of church and state patronage, once more with obvious aesthetic success.

European Romanticism, promoting (indeed, worshiping) the Self, more often than not considered that Self a teacher and a liberator of mankind; and European realism of the Dickensian kind regarded the exposure and the correction of society's ills to be one, if not the chief one, of art's duties. The Romantic and Realist movements generated a loud echo in Russia (a distorted echo, to be sure, since Russian society was not precisely European). Literary critics of the nineteenth century, including Belinsky, Chernyshevsky, and Pisarev, valued moral passion and a didactic approach to social problems more than anything else. They were generally noble and self-sacrificing types, but they were also extremely narrow-minded persons. Chernyshevsky distinguished himself also as a graphomaniac novelist, and was ridiculed by Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and Nabokov. But he saw his task as nothing less than the creation of role models for the "new people" who promoted vague but revolutionary changes in society (including a certain "sexual revolution" quite modest by today's standards).

It is important to note that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky themselves, though they were inimical to Chernyshevsky and his kin, were also full of social and moral indignation, and were themselves rather fond of didacticism. Perhaps it could not be otherwise in Russia, the land of serfdom, corrupt gentry, and arbitrary rule. Being geniuses, however, and not graphomaniacs, they took into account the weaknesses of human nature, the ineradicability of evil, the uniqueness of the individual. And yet an ancient notion, harking back to Byzantine Orthodoxy, remained in their work: the idea that a human being can be made into a saint by the efforts of his elders; or that he can, at the very least, be considerably improved by the appropriate reading.

Dissolve to Maxim Gorky, a famous and not too bad writer, a little unfairly despised by contemporary Russian intellectuals. Although close to the Bolsheviks, Gorky was almost a religious idealist; he believed in the innate goodness of the human being, in the unlimited power of his will (he was a pupil of Nietzsche), in the inevitability of progress, and in the so-called "iron laws of history." And with Gorky came Lenin (they maintained a lifelong love-hate relationship), who was a man of Victorian tastes. To Lenin's credit it must be said that he usually did not force his tastes on his friends, but he had the inclination and the courage to pursue any thought to the bitter end. Since the Party and the new Communist state embodied the "iron laws of history" and the idea of progress, it seemed clear to him that human beings could be re-educated according to their true needs.

Thus the writer, too, had to become part and parcel of the common proletarian cause, a servant of the Party and the state, a denouncer of evil tendencies (and, more often than not, of evil persons), a creator of role models in Chernyshevsky's vein, an educator and a prophet who would be handsomely rewarded for his services but severely punished for heterodox thought and false



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prophesy. The Party played the role of the Muses and the Erinyes at the same time. And this, according to Lenin, denoted the highest form of freedom, which would lead to a truly Periclean flourishing of culture.

After the October Revolution, several groups of literati did their best to translate these notions into reality. The most important among them was RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers). It rejected all highbrow experiments. In the matter of style, it tried to imitate classical nineteenth-century realism (which it equated, for unknown reasons, with materialism in philosophy). At the level of ideas, it offered little more than unqualified praise for ever-changing Party politics, for the Party's rabid attacks against any independent or semi-independent writer. Such writers, incidentally, remained alive and kicking, and were quite numerous in the '20s.

In the early '30s, however, Stalin drew the final conclusion from Lenin's idea. All men and women of letters had to join a single organized body under the strict supervision of the Party, dominated by Party members, funded by the government and responsible to it—a sort of army where, in the words of Mayakovsky, a poem would equal a long-range gun and a rhyme would do the work of a spear. (Mayakovsky, a talented poet of tragic vision, felt a bit ambivalent about such a perspective; hounded by RAPP, he committed suicide on the very eve of these new developments.) And this, Stalinism in culture, was the ultimate perversion of the ancient and medieval concepts.

To be sure, art is not merely a record of personal idiosyncrasies. It may perform—perhaps it should perform—certain social functions. But when the artist or the writer performs such a function, he or she should be answerable only to his or her conscience, not to any group of utopian thinkers who erroneously (and usually not without self-interest) consider their ideology scientific and irrefutable. Moreover, serious literary work requires, as a rule, loneliness and isolation. It is an exercise, in the words of Alexander Blok, in "secret inner freedom." Any outside control of it, even in the comparatively subtle form of collective pressure, destroys it from the very beginning. A union of writers (except, perhaps, a union to defend the rights of writers and to safeguard their relations with publishers) is a contradiction in terms.

Ironically, almost all the survivors of the First Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union, which was held in August 1934, recall it somewhat nostalgically. With typical Stalinist hypocrisy, the congress was disguised as the liberation of literature from the insidious schemes of RAPP. (The Garrards note the slightly ominous fact that the term *perestroika* was coined by Stalin in connection with the establishment of the Union.) The major speeches by Gorky and Bukharin were rather liberal in their context, which helps to explain the euphoric and slightly carnivalesque mood of the congress. One can discern tragic or ambivalent notes in the statements made by Isaak Babel, Yury Olesha, Boris Pasternak, even by the well-known critic and literary scholar, the enfant terrible of the preceding period, Victor Shklovsky, who condemned his Formalist past and denounced Dostoyevsky and Mayakovsky as traitors of the revolutionary cause. And the voices at the congress belonged, more often than not, to talented people, who were joyous and trustful and probably sincere.

Nobody noticed the fact, however, that the real elite of Russian literature remained, with a few exceptions, beyond the pale. They were not among the delegates to the congress and they did not join (or were not permitted to join) the new Union. I am referring to Anna Akhmatova, the great and persecuted woman writer; Osip Mandelshtam, arguably the best Russian poet after Pushkin, imprisoned at the time of the congress; Mikhail Bulgakov, whose plays were banned and whose magnificent novel *The Master and Margarita*, written in secret, was known only to a small circle of the author's friends; Mikhail Kuzmin, an aesthete and avowed homosexual who penned some of the most elegant poems in Russian or any language; Nikolai Klyuev, a sectarian mystic, patron saint of the "peasant group" in Russian letters; Daniil Kharms, a practitioner of the theater of the absurd before Beckett and Ionesco; and I should also add the émigrés, such as Ivan Bunin, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Vladimir Nabokov. From the very beginning, in other words, almost all that was best in Russian literature developed outside the Writers' Union, paid no attention to it, treated it only with sarcasm. And this remains true also of the present period in Russian literature. The Garrards remind us that four of the five Russian winners of the Nobel Prize in literature either never belonged to the Writers' Union (Bunin and Brodsky) or were expelled from it (Pasternak and Solzhenitsyn).

The upbeat mood that prevailed at the First Congress did not last long. The former leaders of RAPP duly took over the leadership of the new and larger body. The most impressive figure among them was Alexander Fadeyev, a writer of some stature and a man capable of playing with the baby of a friend immediately after countersigning the warrant for the arrest of the baby's father. He committed suicide after Stalin's death, leaving behind a letter the contents of which remain unknown. (Party bosses who have seen the letter have described it as a "terrible" attack against the Politburo.) And Fadeyev was surrounded by even more unsavory types. During the purges of the late '30s, the Union became "an agency of Stalin's Terror against its own members," as well as "a cornucopia of privileges and luxuries" for its members who did not deviate from the line and denounced their comrades (though luxuries and privileges could be exchanged for a prison ration silently and very fast).

The number of arrested writers—most of them perished—varies according to the sources. The Garrards give several estimates, ranging from 600 to 2,000. Many non-Russian literatures, including Ukrainian, were wiped out almost completely. The line between victims and persecutors is fairly blurred. Many willing fanatics perished as well, and a figure like Fadeyev may be plausibly counted among those victims. And one must add to the grim list the many writers who never belonged to the Union, or did not have enough time to develop their gifts. Some famous authors did not end up in camps, but they slowly suffocated in the atmosphere of Stalin's state (Yury Olesha, Yury Tynianov, Mikhail Zoschhenko); others became dull administrators and died spiritually before they died physically (Konstantin Fedin, Nikolai Tikhonov).

In those days, in sum, the occupational hazards of writing were much greater than the occupational hazards of flying planes or climbing mountains. Nothing similar had ever happened in the history of world culture. As a result, the Russian and Soviet literary scene remains a disaster area, a cultural Chernobyl, a field inhabited by surviving mutants and by several incredibly tough men and women who withstood the poisoning against all odds.

At last this tremendous waste of human beings and human potential is a thing of the past. Since the realization of any Platonic idea in this corrupt world is a matter of great difficulty, the Stalinist utopia reigned supreme for a relatively short period of time. The war was an early gust of genuine existence in this Kafkaesque universe. After the war, public humiliations began to be used as a surrogate for show trials and summary executions (which also took place). The most famous case, which had immense

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consequences, was a vicious attack by Andrei Zhdanov, the most caddish among Stalin's henchmen, on several writers, including Akhmatova, whom he called "half nun and half whore." (The vile epithet was characteristically plagiarized by Zhdanov from a literary encyclopedia.)

The Second Congress of the Writers' Union was held in 1954, immediately after Stalin's death. At the time, some very modest room for maneuvering was forming. There were writers who dared to talk about "sincerity," "self-expression," and similarly unorthodox notions. Their movement was pitifully weak, however, and consisted mainly in repeating well-intentioned clichés. The Garrards overstate their case—for example, when they describe the efforts of Ilya Ehrenburg as a "crusade for fundamental human values and literary standards." More significant and risky stirrings were taking place, as always, outside the framework of the Union. In time, those efforts led to the appearance of the Soviet "counterculture" crowned by Solzhenitsyn and Brodsky.

What the Garrards describe as a "bizarre world of privilege and menace" gradually began to change. The menace was decreasing, and the privilege became the main, if not the only, means of control. One still could be denounced, expelled from the Union, deprived of one's livelihood, even arrested and exiled. But to earn such punishments one had to challenge the authorities directly, like Lidia Chukovskaya or Andrei Sinyavsky. The quiet ones were left alone; and those who accepted all the rules of the game could count on endless perks and advantages. In the blessed days of Brezhnev and his immediate successors, the Writers' Union became a virtual velvet prison. The bulk of the Garrards' book describes the workings of this "Soviet Parnassus" with skill and verve. It developed into a complex and glorious machine for extinguishing talent, not by physical annihilation but by their adaptation to a corrupt environment.

"The Union is the writer's full-time employer," state the Garrards. Those who intend to make a living as poets, essayists, novelists, critics, or translators are expected to join it or face an extremely precarious existence. The procedure for joining the Union is not an easy one. Potential troublemakers may be eliminated at the preliminary stage. On the other hand, in the words of the émigré writer Vladimir Voinovich, the Union "now counts among its members the directors of stores, public baths, theaters, and sports stadiums; ministers; Party bureaucrats of every rank; generals of all the services, including the KGB and the MVD; and even marshals of the Soviet Union."

The border between apparatchiks and writers was blurred already in 1934. Now the difference is virtually imperceptible. Brezhnev, incidentally, did not join the Union, but he did his best to earn praise (and the Lenin Prize) by his soporific memoirs, which were concocted for him by a group of ghostwriters. Even Andropov produced some unreadable poems, which were popularized by sycophants for several months after his death. He probably cherished the opinion that he was a writer inferior to none among the Union's members. The opposite opinion is no less true: Georgy Markov, a long-time first secretary of the Writers' Union, writes decidedly on the level of Brezhnev, and Yegor Isayev, an influential conservative versifier, produces gibberish second only to Andropov's.

The gravitation of apparatchiks toward literature and of literati toward the apparat may be partly explained by the traditional prestige enjoyed by writers in Russian lands. Besides, a successful writer—that is, a writer approved by the Party and the official critics—may receive royalties that sound impressive even for a Politburo member. The Garrards note that Markov had 4,129,000 copies of his works printed in five years. The rabid nationalist and militarist Yury Bondarev had 5,868,000 copies printed during the same period. Many of the copies are compulsorily distributed to a vast network of Soviet libraries, many more are turned into pulp, a number may even be bought and read by unhappy Soviet citizens; but the author is handsomely paid for every copy. His or her work is immediately translated, moreover, into several dozen Soviet languages, which brings still more income.

And there are many other advantages. A member of the Union gets adequate housing, including housing for his or her relatives—and this against the background of the horrible Soviet housing crisis. The apartments and the dachas of the big shots are certainly more than adequate. Members of the Union obtain better medical care than the average citizen; they have easier access to coveted goods (including books); they enjoy well-paid lecture tours, first-class hotels modestly called "writers' retreats," one of the very best restaurants in Moscow (already satirized by Bulgakov), and foreign travel, which provides occasions for lucrative trafficking in jeans, videos, and computers.

In exchange for all this, members of the Union were usually expected to support and to eulogize the status quo—a small inconvenience, especially if one bears in mind that the status quo was genuinely beneficial for them. At the end of the Brezhnev period, even that requirement was dropped, particularly in the national republics such as Lithuania and Estonia. You were allowed to write all kinds of mythological, surrealist, ultramodernist, absurdist, quasi-philosophical, or mildly critical stuff, provided that you never questioned the Party's supremacy, never touched upon any real taboos (such as the privileges of the *nomenklatura* or the tensions between the nationalities), and preserved in your writing something vaguely described as a "life-affirming quality." There were, of course, writers who violated these taboos, but they, as a rule, found themselves outside the Union, or never joined it. Thus they forfeited their "diplomatic immunity," they could not be considered working persons, and they might be condemned to internal exile as "parasites"—a fate that befell Brodsky, who was busy writing brilliant poems and did not care to join the Union. Incomparably easier was the lot of Konstantin Voronkov, a member and a functionary, whose main literary achievement consisted in compiling the telephone directory of the Union's members and executive bodies.

An informal truce was concluded: the writers would not fight the authorities (though the chosen ones among them may feign fighting, like Yevtushenko and Voznesensky), and the authorities would provide them with their bread or their caviar, depending on rank. The predictable result was tremendous corruption and cronyism. There were dis-

Matthew 6:9-13

Blue herons that fish in silence,
webs that sag with dew,
old pines in mist,
the snow at sea,
and hues as they merge in evening,
rain on mossed rocks,
and crackling flames,
and a breeze touched with brine,
and leaf-stained light in autumn,
Gandhi, Bach, Monet, Maria,
and a stream pool laved with pollen,
the surf as it lathers
and then hisses on the beaches,
the twilight, the stillness
: these things

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plays of incredible vanity and ostentatious consumption in all of the Union's branches. The Garrards write almost exclusively about the Russian branch, but much of what they describe is more glaring in Belorussia or Uzbekistan. While Georgy Markov managed to erect a statue of himself in his Siberian hometown, the Uzbek apparatchik Sharaf Rashidov, who posed as a first-class writer, allegedly possessed palaces furnished with slaves.

While the transformation of society along utopian lines was a hopeless task, the authorities have certainly succeeded in transforming many of its writers. The Garrards offer a telling detail: "Many of the top secretaries [of the Union] and favored authors live in large apartment buildings on Bezbozhny Pereulok (literally, 'Godless Lane'), which is located in the Dzerzhinsky District of Moscow to the north of the downtown area." The name of the district is no less characteristic than the name of the lane. Dzerzhinsky was the founding father of the Cheka (today's KGB), and the cohabitation between the Writers' Union and Dzerzhinsky's heirs remains cozy, to say the least.

But the worst thing, surely, was the dreadful provincialism, the flood of mediocrities that virtually submerged one of the leading literatures of the world. The Soviet Writers' Union has approximately 9,000 members. According to a popular story, the head of the Union's branch in the Tula region boasted during one of the Union's congresses: "There are more than 200 writers in our region today, while under the czarist regime there was only one." He failed to mention that the one in question was Tolstoy.

The period of glasnost has produced far-reaching changes in the literary world, too. The Garrards were able to document only the first stages of that period; their latest materials date from 1988 or early 1989. The most interesting development, which preceded Gorbachev's era to a degree, appears to be the shift "from purity to profit." In literature, as in almost every area of Soviet life, capitalism has struck back with a vengeance. There was a sharp decline in the quantity of books actually sold. The increasingly literate readers, fed up with Markovs, Bondarevs, and Isayevs, switched over to Russian classics, particularly the less-known and suppressed ones; to escapist pap (including science fiction with occult overtones); and to the so-called *tamizdat* books of banned authors published in the West. European, American, and Japanese writers became tremendously popular: almost everything was snatched up, from Basho and Proust to the most average detective stuff. In the national republics, native classics and émigré writers (who were never forgotten) enjoyed a new surge of success.

Gorbachev's regime legalized these changes, limiting and then virtually abolishing petty censorship. Economic reforms introduced a modicum of competition in the literary field. Glasnost, in other words, threatens the privileged position of the "new leisure class," which is far from ready to surrender without a fight. The disappearance of the shelter provided by the Union and the leap into the cruel world of supply and demand (from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom, you might say) would be the deepest trauma conceivable, not only for the literary bosses but for any Soviet writer, the liberals included. I do not think that more than a very small number of them would be able to survive by writing under free market conditions. They are beginning to understand that.

Today the situation is in flux. There are at least two groups of writers. The liberals, which include Vitaly Korotich, Andrei Bitov, Anatoly Pristavkin, Anatoly Rybakov (and the eternal and slightly musty freedom fighters Yevtushenko and Voznesensky), use several new bodies, such as the April Committee and the Soviet PEN branch, to promote their reformist agenda. The "village conservatives," old Stalinists and born-again fascists such as Valentin Rasputin, Viktor Astafyev, Vasily Belov, Yury Bondarev, and Pyotr Proskurin, have their own magazines (although their subscriptions are shrinking), dominate the Russian Republic branch of the Union, and presumably enjoy the support of the army and the KGB elite.

The Union is an umbrella for both groups. The split between the liberals and the conservatives, however, is not the most important one. There is a deeper and more significant distinction. It is the one between writers and non-writers. If the writers prevail, the Writers' Union will wither away. Writers usually do not care about partisan politics, factions, agendas, and so on. Their attitude was best expressed by Mandelshtam, an avowed enemy of the Union and similar bodies (which repaid him in persecution and torture):

> I tear off my literary fur-coat and trample it underfoot. In nothing but my jacket, and in thirty-degree frost, I will run three times around the concentric boulevard rings of Moscow. I shall flee from the red-light district hospital of the Komsomol arcade into a mortal chill, if only not to see those twelve lit Judas-windows of that obscene house . . . , if only not to hear the clink of silver and the counting of printer's sheets.

The future of a literature depends not on those obscene houses, but on the writers who do not care to cross their threshold .

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The Ohioan

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Above the River: The Complete Poems by James Wright

(A Wesleyan University Press edition/Farrar, Straus & Giroux and University Press of New England, 387 pp., $27.95)

The appearance of James Wright's *The Branch Will Not Break* in 1963 prompted enough controversy that Wright could reasonably say in 1979, the year before he died of cancer at fifty-two, that writing poetry had made him "notorious." The book won praise for its visionary brilliance, blame for its intellectual vacuity, in roughly equal measure. One looks back almost wistfully to such occasions. What would it take for a new book of poems to arouse passionate controversy today? But while embattled books like *The Waste Land* and *Howl* and *Ariel* (not to mention *Leaves of Grass*) retain their capacity to offend and to charm, it's hard to summon up the unsettling force of *The Branch Will Not Break*.

The book was hugely influential, and perhaps it's the fault of what came after that *The Branch* seems fairly typical of much of the poetry of the Vietnam years, with its vaguely Asian mysticism, its melancholy surrealism, its passionate but inarticulate social protest. A poem called "The Undermining of the Defense Economy" relies for its argument on passages like this:

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A pumpkin
Lies on its side,
Turning yellow as the face
Of a discharged general.

This is the poetry of flowers in rifle bores, *Howl* with the volume turned down to a baffled yelp.

The Branch Will Not Break seems harmless enough now, sometimes even quaint. Its strengths are those of craftsmanship masquerading as artlessness. Consider the thirteen lines of "Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in Pine Island, Minnesota," perhaps the best known and most hotly debated poem in the volume:

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze up into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

Twenty years ago I found this poem exhilarating; today it's hard to bring it into focus. The hammock and the chicken hawk—its two authentic details—fool one into thinking it's a nature poem. Wright himself liked to compare it to classical Chinese nature poetry, where the mood is carried by the weight of natural detail. But surely the poem is less Chinese than *chinoiserie*; that lacquer inlay of bronze butterfly, black trunk, green shadow, golden stone harks back to Amy Lowell and early Pound. Its length and its epigrammatic close flirt with the shape of the sonnet. Like many of the ostensible nature poems in the collection, it's really a hymn to artifice.

Robert Bly, in a well-known essay on Wright published in 1965, claimed that in the poems of *The Branch Will Not Break*, "Doors silently open into unused parts of the brain." That may be so. But the publication of Wright's complete poetry reveals other doors worth trying, especially some of the poems in the two books of formal verse that preceded *The Branch—The Green Wall* (1957) and *Saint Judas* (1959)—and the uneven but fascinating books that came later: *Two Citizens* (1973), *To a Blossoming Pear Tree* (1977), and *This Journey* (1982). Indeed, it may turn out that Wright's whole career, routinely mapped—by Bly and others—as an early mastery of traditional forms followed by a triumphant release into visionary free verse, has been misunderstood. Early and late, Wright was writing sonnets and elegies, prayers and laments. A remarkable consistency distinguishes his best work, and that integrity has everything to do, it seems to me, with his upbringing and continual imaginative involvement in the landscape and manners of a certain part of the Midwest.

The lag of biography has so far spared the poets of Wright's generation, and one must rely on the poet Donald Hall's fine introduction to *Above the River* for a sketch of Wright's life. Hall is tactful about his old friend, but the details he gives follow the manic-depressive pattern of the previous generation of American poets: Robert Lowell, Berryman, and Jarrell. Wright was born in Martins Ferry, Ohio, in 1927—the birthplace of William Dean Howells almost a century earlier. He came from a working-class—or, as he liked to say, slave-class—background. His father worked at a glass company across the Ohio River in Wheeling, West Virginia. His mother, from a family of "honest-to-God hillbillies," according to Wright, worked in a laundry until she was married. The family lived in rented houses during the Depression. But despite the evident deprivation of the family, Wright's early years come across, in poems and memoirs, as a classic Midwestern boyhood: swimming in the river or the WPA swimming pool, stealing apples from the local Scrooge, playing football (the great placekicker Lou Groza was on Wright's high school team).

The idyll had a dark side, though. Boyhood chums drowned in "suck-holes" in the river while their fathers died a slower death in the factories. Pastoral and nightmare mingle in a passage from an autobiographical sketch Wright published in 1978:

> For all its dangers, the river still had the power to make the banks green, and some of us children of the blast furnaces and factories and mines kept faith with the river. . . . I often joined my friends from Aetnaville and southern Martins Ferry to swim naked from the bare-ass beach to the northern tip of Wheeling Island. The water there was beautiful in its rawness and wildness, though something was forever drifting past to remind us of the factories that lined the banks to the north. They were always there, just as the Martins Ferry Cemetery overlooking the entire town seemed, wherever one stood, to hang in the sky above the Laughlin Steel Mill.

The cemetery and the factory, pitched above the "dark gash" of the Ohio River, dominate Wright's poetry early and late; he thought of all three as potential graves.

Before he graduated from high school, Wright suffered a nervous breakdown; later in life other hospitalizations followed, for depression and alcoholism. After a brief stint in the Army, Wright attended Kenyon College on the G.I Bill—not, he claimed later, because John Crowe Ransom and the *Kenyon Review* were there, but because it was the only college in Ohio that would take him. He studied with Ransom and later, while earning a doctorate in English, with Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington. Both mentors, master formalists with a sure sense of diction and wit, leave an imprint on the best poems in Wright's first two books. A poem about the owner of the pilfered apple orchard, for example, concludes:

Sorry for him, or any man
Who lost his labored wealth to thieves,
Today I mourn him, as I can,
By leaving in their golden leaves
Some luscious apples overhead.
Now may my abstinence restore
Peace to the orchard and the dead.
We shall not nag them any more.

The surefooted and workmanlike tetrameter lines are characteristic of Wright's early poetry, but "nag," with its sudden dip into another verbal register, is the triumph here, the hook into small-town Ohio. One can imagine a poet less sure of the vernacular settling for a more decorous word like "plague" or "vex."

Six books followed, as Wright put together an impressive oeuvre as well as a respectable academic career. He re-

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fused to be a poet in residence, preferring to teach his academic speciality, nineteenth-century fiction (his thesis was on Dickens), and this obstinacy, combined with his alcoholism, probably cost him tenure at the University of Minnesota in 1963. (The more flagrantly misbehaving but better-known John Berryman did get tenure at about the same time at Minnesota, though in the humanities department, not in English.) A timely Guggenheim gave Wright some breathing room and a chance to travel in Europe, and in 1966 he accepted a job at Hunter College in New York City, where he taught for the rest of his life. In 1966 he also met Edith Ann Runk, the "Annie" of his poems. Their marriage the following year—his second—seems to have given a much needed stability, and sobriety, to the last fifteen years of his life.

The posthumous complete poems seem an appropriate monument for our greatest graveyard poet since Edgar Lee Masters. (Surely one inflection of the title *Above the River* is the Martins Ferry Cemetery hanging above the Ohio.) It's hard to think of another American poet who wrote more "At the Grave of . . ." poems than James Wright, starting with the early achievement of "At the Executed Murderer's Grave," with its bitter, Villonesque opening:

> My name is James A. Wright, and I was
> born
> Twenty-five miles from this infected
> grave,
> In Martins Ferry, Ohio, where one slave
> To Hazel-Atlas Glass became my father.
> He tried to teach me kindness. I return
> Only in memory now, aloof, unhurried,
> To dead Ohio, where I might lie buried,
> Had I not run away before my time.

Wright came to think of poetry as a way to counter all the death he saw around him, hence his love of epigraphs and elegies—of inscriptions that survived a single human life. In a late poem addressed to the Roman poet Horace, he remarked of his own father:

> I worked once in the factory that he
> worked in.
> Now I work in that factory that you live
> in.
> Some people think poetry is easy,
> But you two didn't.

Throughout Wright's life, a daily dedication to the work of poetry, as reliable but more hopeful than a nine-to-five stint at the factory, seems to have served as an anchor against his own private terrors.

But "dead Ohio" remained a crucial part of Wright's baggage, even as he fled from it. "The one tongue I can write in / Is my Ohioan," he wryly wrote in the last poem in *Two Citizens*. Wright liked to say that he began as an acolyte of Frost and Edwin Arlington Robinson, and surely their dedication to well-made poems, in the vernacular, with some serious moral weight, had a bearing on Wright's work. But this conceals his true inspiration, which lies in a certain tradition of Midwestern populism. All of Wright's work is drenched in the democratic sadness of Sherwood Anderson (one of whose poems provides the epigraph for *To a Blossoming Pear Tree*), Masters, and even James Whitcomb Riley, one of whose books was the first poetry Wright owned and read.

Wright often tries to find aesthetic dignity in gestures that seem sappy and sentimental in Riley. For example, in Wright's accounts of whittling the names of girls into sycamore trees—"You cannot even carve a girl's name on the sumac," he complained ("The Sumac in Ohio")—he is looking for a Midwestern analogy for more traditional acts of poetic inscription. And surely Wright is one of the last American writers to find continuing life in the mythology of freight-hopping hoboes, whom he links with other small-town pleasure seekers:

> From prudes and muddying fools,
> King Aphrodite, spare
> All hunted criminals
> Hoboes, and whip-poor-wills,
> And girls with rumpled hair . . .

In a prose-poem from *This Journey*, Wright described the lines on a turtle's face, suggesting "a delicacy in the understanding of the grass, like the careful tenderness I saw once on the face of a hobo in Ohio as he waved greeting to an empty wheat field from the flatcar of a freight train."

During the last years of his life, when he and Annie got to Europe, and especially Italy, whenever they could, Wright must have felt himself to be something of a wanderer, a hobo hopping grants. In his last two books, Italy becomes a sort of Ohio of the mind, a higher, ideally transformed Ohio—hence the rightness of the cover of *Above the River*, with its photograph of the Ohio River on the front and the Adige of Verona on the back. Wright, always fascinated with poetry as an act of inscription, of memorializing, revelled in this country of monuments and ruins and graves and epitaphs. Sipping a cappuccino in Rome, he found himself pondering "the antiquities of my childhood: the beautiful river, that black ditch of horror," which he associated with the "intricate and intelligent series of ditches" that archaeologists had unearthed in the Colosseum.

A new confidence enters these late poems about Italy, as Wright finds himself writing not only in the factory but in the country that Horace worked in. From his last collection, *This Journey*, comes the lovely sonnet "In View of the Protestant Cemetery in Rome," which begins:

> It is idle to say
> The wind will blow your fingers all away
> And scatter small blue knucklebones upon
> The ground from hell to breakfast and
> beyond.
> You will sit listening till I am gone
> To seed among the pear trees. For my
> voice
> Sprinkles a few light petals on this pond,
> And you nod sagely, saying I am wise.

Wright is aware that he's writing in a grand tradition—the sonnet as monument against the passing of time—but he toys with the occasion, downplaying and domesticating it. One notes the acceleration of the short first line, the witty enjambment of "Till I am gone / To seed," those homely verbs "scatter" and "sprinkle," and the homelier still (and somehow Ohioan) "knucklebones" and "breakfast." Such pleasures outweigh the occasional pontifications—another tendency of the Midwest populists—that Wright allows himself, on such subjects as America's puritan inclinations and the difficulty of learning that "your life is your own life."

I have heard it argued that Wright has a particular claim on our interest right now because of the way he straddles the perceived divide between free and formal verse. By this argument, Wright was a formalist like Richard Wilbur and Anthony Hecht during the 1950s, a freeist like Bly, with whom he worked closely, during the 1960s, and in his last three books a poet who moved back and forth between formal and free, depending on the needs of any given poem. But a more probing reading of his work reveals a tough and touching poet who, while never relinquishing his Midwestern roots, found ways to grow as a poet, with a deepening sense of tradition and of the nature of the factory he labored in.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches at Mount Holyoke College and is completing a book on Stephen Crane.

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The brutal and lyrical world of Camilo José Cela.

The Tremendist

BY CHRISTOPHER MAURER

Cela has long been a household word in Spain, though not a polite one. No Spanish writer since Francisco de Quevedo, who died in 1645, has been so identified in the popular imagination with verbal scandal. Spain's foremost man of letters, the seventy-four-year-old winner of last year's Nobel Prize in literature is also a connoisseur of four-letter words, particularly those that designate genitals. Cela's two-volume *Diccionario secreto* (1968-71) devoted over 200 pages to the testicles, and one of his proudest achievements as a member of the Royal Spanish Academy has been to persuade it to include the word *coño* (from the Latin *cunnus*) in the most recent edition of its dictionary. Spanish writing has drifted too far from popular speech, he likes to argue, and has forgotten the "lexical violence" of its origins. (Twelve centuries ago, an Asturian monk could call the archbishop of Toledo a "*cojón* of the Antichrist.")

Cela's lifelong war on euphemism explains only a part of his notoriety. His literary output is vast: an early book of poems; collections of short stories; books of essays and lectures; an oratorio and a play; reprintings of his columns for the Madrid daily *El País*; transcriptions of his weekly television talk show; travel literature; philological writing on eroticism; modernized versions of Spanish classics; *costumbrismo* (the sketch of manners); memoirs; and eleven novels. Whatever the subject, he has strong opinions, and he airs them regularly on television and in the press. Most important, perhaps, he has been widely criticized for his political past, and this has influenced the reception of his work. Spain's socialist minister of culture, the novelist Jorge Semprun, was conspicuously absent from the ceremonies in Stockholm last fall.

Camilo José Cela was twenty years old in 1936, at the outbreak of the Civil War. A year later he left Republican Madrid, enlisted with Franco, was wounded in battle, and was discharged. In a much reprinted letter of March 1938, Cela offered his services to the security apparatus of Franco's "Glorious National Movement," and asked to be assigned to the capital: "Having lived uninterruptedly in Madrid for the past thirteen years, [the undersigned] believes himself able to provide useful facts on the conduct of certain persons. . . ." The offer was not accepted. In the lean years following Franco's victory, however, Cela accommodated himself to political circumstance: he wrote for the Nationalist press, was protected in official literary circles, and eked out a living as a censor of trade magazines and an employee of the national textile syndicate. In its offices he began *The Family of Pascual Duarte*, which he was able to publish without problems in 1942.

The Family of Pascual Duarte
by Camilo José Cela
translated and with an introduction
by Anthony Kerrigan
(Little, Brown, 192 pp., $16.95, $7.95 paper)

The Hive
translated by J. M. Cohen
in consultation with Arturo Barea
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 250 pp.,
$19.95, $8.95 paper)

Journey to the Alcarria:
Travels Through the Spanish Countryside
translated by Frances M. López-Morillas
(Atlantic Monthly Press, 176 pp., $8.95)

Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son
translated and with an introduction
by J. S. Bernstein
(Cornell University Press, 232 pp.,
$29.95, $8.95 paper)

Within a few years, however, Cela's relations with officialdom went sour. The censor himself began to be censored. Both the second edition of *Pascual* (1943) and his second major work, *The Hive*, were banned in Spain. After he published the latter in Buenos Aires in 1951, Cela was expelled from the Madrid Press Association. The royalties from a paperback edition of J. M. Cohen's English translation (it appeared in 1954 and is reprinted now with minor revisions) helped Cela make ends meet while he set up shop on the island of Mallorca. There he published *Papeles de Son Armadans* (1956-79), an excellent literary monthly that was hospitable to many of the exiled writers and critics who were ignored or silenced by the "official" press. Whatever his political beliefs, it seems fair to say that Cela's work on behalf of free expression has overshadowed his early service to the Franco regime. "Love," says the cynical Spanish proverb, "is deeds, not fine words."

Critics have often praised Cela's stylistic "restlessness" and his love of "experimentation." In fact, Cela's roots as a novelist and an essayist may be found in nineteenth-century European realism, and in a literary movement known as the Generation of 1898, a group of individualistic Spanish writers who sought to redefine their country's identity and its relation to Europe after the humiliation of the Spanish-American War. Reading Cela, one is reminded of Spain's almost self-enclosed literary tradition, of its isolation in the 1940s and 1950s.

Cela's yearning to make Spanish more supple and more inclusive resembles the project of Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), whose unorthodox views on the novel Cela took to heart in his early work. Cela's description of the Castilian countryside draws on the poetry of Antonio Machado (1875-1939); in what Machado called a bare "corner of the planet," both men have glimpsed "the shadow of Cain." And still more important for the evolution of Cela's work was the truculent realism of Pío Baroja (1872-1956), a novelist almost unknown in English but much admired by Hemingway, and Ramón de Valle-Inclán (1869-1936), with his aesthetic of the grotesque and his satirical novels about nineteenth-century Spanish society. No modern Spanish writer is a more skillful imitator than Cela, a more gifted disciple of the past, a more complete man of letters. An inventor of language, however, he is not: Cela has altered the lexicon, but the words he has added to it have not been his own. His linguistic ideas can be traced to Unamuno and Valle-Inclán, who believed that Castilian would have to be re-created if Spain was to be rescued from intellectual stagnation, though Cela has neither their sense of social mission nor their inventiveness, their power over words.

Cela's first two novels—*The Hive* and *The Family of Pascual Duarte*—were attacked in Spain for what was called their *tremendismo*. It is a vacuous term that has pursued Cela as doggedly as "magical realism" has pursued García Márquez. The word refers confusedly both to style and to subject matter. It denotes, briefly, the unflinching description of anything revolting and grotesque.

There is a classic example in *Pascual Duarte*: when Pascual's brother Mario

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What are the facts?

■ Israel was created for a specific purpose. It is the ingathering of Jews from all over the world, especially those who had been subject for centuries to hostility, violence, oppression, ghettoization, expulsion and — eventually, the unprecedented disaster of the Holocaust, in which 6 million Jews perished. The yearning for the re-establishment of the Jewish homeland in what came to be called "Palestine" had been unremitting over the centuries. In 1917, the British were in control of Palestine and issued the Balfour Declaration, which called for the establishment of "...a national home for Jewish people". This Declaration was confirmed by the League of Nations. The concept of Palestine as a Jewish state was further confirmed by the United Nations, which recognized the new-born Jewish state in 1948.

■ During the second World War, many of the millions of Jews that died in the gas chambers of the Nazis could have been saved if they had been allowed into Palestine. The British, however, under the unrelenting threats of the Arabs, buckled under that pressure and effectively throttled Jewish emigration to Israel, thus condemning many to horrible deaths. The situation today is comparable: Under "glasnost" the virulent history-old anti-Semitism of the Russians and the new-found hatreds in the Islamic parts of the Soviet Union subject the Jewish population to imminent great physical danger and possible pogroms. Emigration to Israel is the only solution.

■ The Arab world has regarded this exodus with undisguised hostility and has urged the Soviet Union to stop emigration to Israel altogether. The pretext for this hostility and opposition is the alleged fear that the Soviet-Jewish immigrants will settle in the administered territories, thus threatening the Palestinian inhabitants and their future hopes for a homeland. But, this is a false charge. The Israeli government gives no incentives to any of the immigrants to move to those areas. Fewer than 1% of all Soviet-Jewish immigrants have moved into the territories.

■ The concern of the Arab states, virtually all of which (with the notable exception of Egypt) consider themselves in a state of war with Israel and which have the destruction of Israel at the very top of their agendas, is not with the "Palestinians". In fact, the "Palestinians" and their aspiration for a homeland are a matter of some indifference to the Arab nations, a pretext for the enmity to Israel. If they were truly concerned about the "Palestinians" and their well-being, they would not have suffered their staying in refugee camps for over forty years, in conditions of utter misery. The real reason is the basic Arab view that the existence of Israel on any land that is considered "sacred Arab soil" is considered a Western plot against Islam and the Arab world and that the destruction of Israel is a sacred religious duty, which calls for "jihad" (holy war) against the "infidels". Even if Israel could be induced to grant the "Palestinians" their mini-state, it would not change the hostility of the Arab nations one iota. Their aim would still be the destruction of Israel, except that, with a Palestinian state, in Israel's heartland, the Arab armies would only be minutes away from Jerusalem, from Tel Aviv, and from the military, industrial, and population centers of the country.

The mass immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel would strengthen Israel. Anything that strengthens Israel is perceived by the Arabs as weakening them and thus making more difficult the planned destruction and dismemberment of the Jewish state. The prospect of Jewish immigration strikes terror in Arab hearts. That explains the hysterical statements and saber rattlings at the recent Arab summit in Baghdad. It explains Arab pressure on the Soviet Union to halt this emigration. It explains why, under Arab pressure, the Soviet Union does not allow direct flights from and to Israel; it explains pressure and threats to blow up commercial aircraft of those countries bordering the Soviet Union that may permit transshipment of Soviet Jews to Israel. Israel was created to be a refuge and homeland to persecuted Jews anywhere in the world. During the second World War, the world stood idly by and did not allow Jews to enter Palestine, which could have saved millions. Nothing like it can be allowed to happen again. Soviet Jews are in imminent mortal danger. They want to leave the Soviet Union and go to Israel. Despite Arab frenzied opposition, the world must see to it that nothing happens to slow this exodus.

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was four years old, we are told, "his luck turned, turned against him for good. Though he hadn't done a thing, though he hadn't bothered a soul or tempted God, a hog (begging your pardon), chewed off his ears." Wondering how to dispose of a human fetus that is stashed in a shoebox under yesterday's newspaper, a grandmother in *San Camilo, 1936* (1969) stokes up the kitchen stove and forces the box through a burner-hole onto the coals. ("Spaniards," another character will remark, "are fonder of fire than water.") Dogs and cats fare worse still: they are drowned or stoned senseless, and street urchins like to poke at them with sticks. One of Cela's characters amuses himself by using a razor to "separate" a pair of copulating dogs. Humans are indifferent to the suffering of animals, and vice versa: cockroaches are never fatter and brighter, they glow "like patent leather," than at the morgue.

Tremendismo is not easy to master. At its best, it is an appeal for mercy. When it is used gratuitously, as it sometimes is in *The Hive*, shock turns into schlock. The historical meaning of Cela's *tremendismo* has been much debated. In the '40s conservative Spaniards found it indecent. "*Pascual Duarte*," wrote a reviewer for a Catholic newspaper in 1942, "has a repulsive realism. Everything, even what is unchaste, is expressed with the same crude brutality. The novel is contaminated by Russian fatalism, and its characters commit crimes against their wills." Outside Spain, however, *tremendismo* was seen as an expression of postwar trauma: as a bleakly pessimistic reaction to violence and bloodshed, as a way of rendering the immoral atmosphere of a totalitarian society. Whatever the case, the description of cruelty is a constant in Cela's work, even in his most recent novels. Of course, Spanish artists (Quevedo, Goya, Valle-Inclán, Buñuel) have always lavished talent upon the grotesque. Cela himself has insisted, as authors of the grotesque often do, that he invents nothing, that reality itself is deformed, that most people will tolerate in life the cruelty that they will not bear in literature.

The Family of Pascual Duarte arose from Cela's fascination with the narrative tone—the strange blend of irony and naïveté, of respect and irreverence—of the anonymous sixteenth-century picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes*, a first-person epistolary narrative that portrayed the scandalous "case" of a social outcast. Together with the confessional nature of his narrative, Cela inherited from this early modern work a perennial philosophical question—the role of fate

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and free will in human conduct—as well as certain readerly expectations. Like Lazarillo's story, Pascual's story could be expected to be a judgment on an entire social milieu.

Pascual, a field worker from Extremadura, the poorest region of Spain, seems (as the critic Gonzalo Sobejano once remarked) like the "Paschal lamb" (*cordero pascual*) sacrificed by his family: that is, by all of Spanish society. Pascual's crimes of passion—the killing of a dog, of a mare, of his sister's pimp, of his own hated mother—culminate in the act for which he is awaiting execution: the murder of a rich rural landowner. The murder of the Count of Torremejía lies outside Pascual's own narrative. It is mentioned, almost in passing, by the transcriber of his confessions, who refuses to speculate about the motives for the deed. The reader learns only that Pascual repented, sought counsel from the prison chaplain, and died an almost exemplary death.

The murder, however, occurs in 1936. For that reason, it has often been seen as a symbolic act of social aggression, as an attack on the conservative rural aristocracy that would unite behind Franco. Using the dates supplied by the narrator, the reader deduces that Pascual's repentance occurred in what would have been a fascist jail, and that he was pardoned by a Catholic Church allied to the regime. Pascual's "case" can thus be understood as a tacit apology for the right. Cela, some argued, was praising the new regime for having pardoned its "prodigal sons" and regenerated Spanish society.

The existence of competing historical interpretations of Cela's work must not be mistaken for evidence of political courage. Politically he is protean, elusive, sometimes inscrutable. He made his peace with fascism, and then made it with socialist democracy. In this respect, too, he has fallen painfully short of the fiery Unamuno. Cela's thoughts on the "Spanish identity" can be read with interest, but unlike Unamuno's, they will never be read with passion. And yet one cannot but admire his skill as a narrator. *Pascual Duarte* is as indestructibly ambiguous as *Lazarillo*, and equally "anonymous"; and those qualities are considerable literary achievements.

Not the least of Cela's triumphs lies in having hidden himself so completely, in having prevented his readers and his censors from assigning definitive blame or putting together a convincing social thesis. Early in the book, for example, Pascual struggles with the accusatory stare of his dog:

> The bitch went on peering at me with a fixed stare, as if she had never seen me before, as if she were on the point of accusing me of something terrible at any moment, and her scrutiny roused the blood in my veins to such a pitch that I knew the moment was near when I would have to give in. It was hot, the heat was stifling, and my eyes began to close under the animal's stare, which was sharp as flint. I picked up my gun and fired. I reloaded, and fired again. The bitch's blood was dark and sticky and it spread slowly along the dry earth.

This is not, as some have written, a "senseless" killing. It is, instead, another reminder of Cela's inscrutability, which is his signature. And perhaps also of his hostility to the reader: Pascual's hatred comes pulsing through the page. It is as though he had leveled his gun at the reader, who has been staring expectantly, perhaps accusingly, since the story began.

However one reads this book, it is an unforgettable encounter with loneliness, hatred, and cruelty. The political meaning of *The Hive*, by contrast, is far less ambiguous. The setting is Madrid during three days in December 1942 or 1943, in the sordid, corrupt society that (as Raymond Carr has noted ironically) Franco "saved." *The Hive* is a discontinuous, fragmented narrative—a cellular, hivelike one—with a cast of over 300 characters who live out their dreary, honeyless, "realist," war-ravaged existence. The most important of them, a lonely writer with vague "social ideas," is sought by the regime, presumably for his minor role before the war in organizing leftist students. The tone is unrelentingly somber, and there is only an occasional glimpse of human kindness:

> There are people whom it amuses to see others having a bad time. To get a close view of it, they haunt the slums, they take battered old things as gifts to dying people, to consumptives huddling under a vile blanket, to anemic little children with swollen bellies and soft bones, to girls who have become mothers at the age of eleven, to whores in their forties, eaten up by pustules and looking like . . . Indian chiefs with the scab.

The interest of this book, which is more dated and less memorable than *Pascual Duarte*, lies in Cela's skill at showing the uncertain and unforeseen ways in which human lives touch one another, and in his tireless observation of the seamy side of urban life. In a prologue to the first edition, Cela calls his novel a "slice of life, drawn without charity." A passage about street benches illustrates the book's scope, and the maudlin quality of its *tremendismo*:

> Street benches are a sort of anthology of every form of trouble and of nearly every form of good fortune: the old man seeking to ease his asthma, the priest reading his breviary, the beggar delousing himself, the bricklayer lunching together with his wife, the consumptive panting for breath, the madman with huge, dreaming eyes, the street musician resting his horn on his knees—each one of them with his urge, great or small, impregnates the planks of the seat with the stale smell of flesh. . . . And the young girl recovering from fatigue after her deep moan of pleasure, and the lady reading a long novel about love, and the blind woman waiting for the hours to pass, and the little typist gulping her sandwich of sausage and coarse bread, and the woman with cancer fighting her pain, and the moron with her gaping mouth dribbling softly . . . and the little girl who likes nothing so much as to watch men peeing.

It is as a patient observer of the city and countryside that Cela will probably leave his mark on Spanish literature. His best descriptive writing lies outside the novel, in travel sketches and essays that carry on, and emulate, the tradition of *costumbrismo*, a genre that has its roots in the nineteenth-century belief that a nation's "character" is best captured in scenes from daily life, by detailed description of its customs, dress, speech, and so on. The best-known and most charming of Cela's travel sketches is *Journey to the Alcarria*, which appeared in 1948, a third-person account of a walking trip through an austere, hilly region to the northeast of Madrid.

"The traveler," the author's alter ego, has promised himself not to sleep for more than one night under the same roof. And here, as in *The Hive*, Cela's liberal apologists have found grist for a redeeming "historical" reading. "The traveler" makes his trip in 1942, the very year in which *The Hive* takes place. Here is the rural portion, the other "hive," of the Spain that Franco saved. The Alcarria is known for its honey. The region is extremely poor, and many of its inhabitants are illiterate, maimed, or idiotic. Most are either indifferent to Spain's glorious past (many a palace and castle is in ruins) or feel defeated by it. "Past splendor overwhelms and in the end exhausts the people's will," the traveler tells himself, "and without force of will . . . they leave current problems unsolved."

Decades after writing the book, Cela insisted that a travel writer ought to limit himself to description, and guard against history and sociology, "foreign elements" that often spoil the genre. Therein lies some of *Journey*'s charm. Read today, in Frances M. López-Morillas's comfortable translation, it seems less like an interpretation of Spanish history and character and more like a version of pastoral. The traveler's senses

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awaken as he leaves Madrid and takes to the open road. The air is so still that the flame of his lighter scarcely wavers, and the smoke from his cigar "rises slowly, straight up, occasionally forming tenuous blue spirals." In the silence he gathers sense data that nobody else attends to: the "harsh, wild, sweetish taste" of goat's milk; the breath of a child that "smells like a baby calf's, a little suckling calf's"; the gloom of a village that "seems to have no business being surrounded by green fields." In the fragrant shade of a hawthorn tree, "an adolescent goatherd and a member of his flock are sinning one of the oldest of sins."

As in Cela's novels, chance and necessity tug at each other in an almost palpable way. And "the traveler" seems always to strike the right balance between the observation of particulars and the impulse toward generality. Cela is less sentimental here than in *The Hive*: his attentiveness to place names and to nicknames opens his eyes to all sorts of idiosyncrasy. The hard-working inhabitants of one village "are called 'Squatters' . . . the rumor goes that they sleep in a squatting position so as to be able to get up early and go to the fields." The fat-legged folk of another are mocked, for miles about, as "Fat-Calves," and "while he is having a smoke with the cart driver," the traveler learns of town-dwellers referred to as Misers, Itchies, Tricksters, and Mangies. Those from Hontanillas are " 'Trough-Eaters,' because they eat from the pig's trough so as not to get the plates dirty."

Cela's guiding intuition has always been that truth dwells in particulars, and it has usually kept him from renaming people and objects. In *Journey*, metaphor, which is rare in his work, would have seemed especially irreverent. The domain of "the traveler" is, rather, gentle simile:

> An old light-colored ox with long horns and a sharp thin face like a knight of Toledo is drinking from the basin of a brimming fountain beside the washing place, barely dipping his grizzled muzzle into the water. When he has finished drinking he lifts his head and passes behind the women, humble and wise. He seems like a loyal eunuch, bored and discreet, who guards a harem. . . . The traveler follows the animal's slow, resigned progress with perplexed eyes. Sometimes the traveler feels completely transfixed by things he cannot possibly explain.

This lyricism burns still more brightly in the novel *Mrs. Caldwell Speaks to Her Son* (1953), now back in print in J. S. Bernstein's competent, though badly edited, translation. This is the diary of an eccentric English widow, who pours out her incestuous love for her only son, who drowned in the Aegean Sea before the story begins. Like *The Hive*, *Mrs. Caldwell* is arranged in fragments; like *Pascual Duarte*, the narration belongs virtually to the epistolary genre. (The son is so vividly present in his mother's thoughts that the diary fragments have the feel of short letters.)

Mrs. Caldwell's progression from lucidity to madness (she dies in an insane asylum) allows Cela to display the whole range of his lyrical gifts. As always, a "classical" Spanish writer is silently evoked and emulated: the first half of the book is an implicit and very brilliant tribute to the metaphorical powers of Ramón Gómez de la Serna (1891-1963), a novelist remembered for his humorous aphorisms. While still lucid, Mrs. Caldwell takes her dead son on an imaginative, wide-ranging tour of "reality," and seems capable of bringing all things—from colored pencils to chrysanthemums, from well-bred neighbors to seal hunters—within the reach of humoristic metaphor. The wit of Gómez de la Serna (and perhaps of Wilde) is emulated in observations like these:

> [S]hipwrights . . . resemble industrious and happy coffinmakers.
>
> *
>
> Family life is the drug that makes families stupid.
>
> *
>
> In a better world . . . , in a more just and reasonable world, pigeons would live on deserted and distant islands.

Yet the miscellaneous and impersonal nature of the aphorism never threatens the intimacy and the unity of this lovely book. Mrs. Caldwell's imagination returns always to her son, bringing him the little gifts of poetic analogy that she has gathered. Sails, for example, remind her of bedsheets, and bedsheets make her remember her son:

> If you and I lived in the days of sailing ships, oh! if you and I lived! / In the sailing days, the sea resembled a bedroom in which—what a shame to have been born too late!—you and I would have met! . . . / In the sailing days, Eliacim, the sea pretended to be a forest of amorous trails, a jungle which had lost its virginity for love. / Today, no longer.

As the heroine drifts toward madness, her powers of metaphor wane. Yet the novel only gains in poetic interest. Mrs. Caldwell's madness lies in the abandonment of a public domain (humor, metaphor) for a private one: a hell of impenetrable images. These, too, are bizarre and memorable. Half dead of tuberculosis, the heroine often coughs up blood in her sleep. The stains on her pillow have the shape of her dead son's head. "I cut them out carefully," she says, "and so that they do not ravel, I usually make a little hem all round them; this is how I spend almost my whole day now." When she dies, she hopes to be wrapped in a shroud stitched together from "all the portraits of you that I spit out each morning." "Madness," writes Cela in an afterword, "embodies a logic as subtle as it is elusive, before which we must with humility confess our impotence." The same is true of good poetry, as *Mrs. Caldwell* reminds us.

Only Cela's earliest work is available in English; all four of these books were written before 1953. In his most recent and untranslated novels, from his Civil War saga *San Camilo, 1936* (1969) to *Cristo versus Arizona* (1987), Cela has experimented with the possibilities of soliloquy, with what Gonzalo Sobejano has called narrative "litany." In these works, observes Sobejano, an individual voice appeals to what is sacred, or what can transport us toward the sacred, while evoking "the multitudinous evils of an inhuman, subhuman, or 'too human' world: misery, violence, aberration."

If Cela's many writings share a theme, it is loneliness. All of his novels pit the individual against the collectivity, and probe the solitude of the traveler, the infirm, the writer, the madman, the social outcast. And as with characters, so with words: Cela has befriended the language that has been expelled from polite society. His prodigious lexicographical work—a sort of scholarly *tremendismo*—is a glossary of his own essays and fiction, a protective wall surrounding them, an assurance that his own work will be understood.

He has seen himself, rather flatteringly, as a misunderstood, solitary figure. In the '50s Cela called himself the greatest novelist since the Generation of 1898, and added: "It scares me to think how easy it has been." His individualism and his sense of isolation are a perfect image of pre-democratic Spain, that outsider to Europe, whose literary scene he dominated. Perhaps the judges in Stockholm thought of him as a symbol. If so, they were wrong. Cela stands at the end of a chapter of Spanish literary history. He is a grim survivor, a keeper of tradition. For decades he kept the novel alive in the country that gave birth to it, listening, more attentively than others, to the ghosts of an introspective, violent past.

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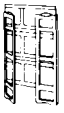

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

Actors' inequity

GEORGE F. WILL THINKS HE HAS a pretty good idea who is to blame for the grossest non-Iraq-related news event of the week. The news event was that Actors' Equity, the thespians' union, barred the producers of *Miss Saigon*, a *Les Miz*-style Euro-mega-musical, from allowing Jonathan Pryce to play on Broadway the part he has been playing (to universal acclaim) in the London production, on the grounds that Equity cannot "appear to condone the casting of a *Cauc*asian in the role of a *Eur*asian." Italics mine. Who should take the bone for this idiotic decision, in the wake of which the producers, quite properly refusing to be bullied, canceled the show? Mr. Will's answer, in his Sunday column, is "contemporary liberalism." Also, in case anyone is left in doubt as to the identity of the culprit, Mr. Will arraigns "liberal thinking," "liberalism," "liberal compassion" (he's being sarcastic), "liberals," "liberal jurisprudence," and "some American liberals."

PERHAPS ONE SHOULD BE GRATEful for that "some," as it seems to admit at least the possibility that "other" American liberals might not go along with Equity's inequity. But why should liberalism have to accept the stigma for this one at all? I mean, look here. I'm a liberal. Some of my best friends are liberals. None of us supports what Equity has done. In fact we all agree with Mr. Will that the decision is an outrage. But what in the world is "liberal" about it? And while we're at it, why in the world must every event in the public sphere be classified as either liberal or conservative? Why can't certain things just be classified as wrong?

MAYBE MR. WILL CONSIDERS EQuity's decision to be an example of liberalism on the march because Equity is a trade union, and trade unions are ipso facto "liberal," just as employers' associations are ipso facto "conservative." Equity, moreover, is a trade union made up mostly of New York stage actors, a notoriously arty, bohemian set of people. And although I don't really know this for a fact any more than Mr. Will does, I'm as certain as he is that most or all of the twenty-two or twenty-three (*The New York Times* wasn't sure) members of the union's governing council who voted for this atrocity are "liberals." On the other hand, I'd be willing to bet him a pair of fourth-row center seats for *City of Angels* that all or most of the eighteen council members who voted *against* it are "liberals," too. And I reckon that the great majority of the 150-plus Equity members who immediately petitioned for a reconsideration of the decision are "liberals" as well. Let's face it: except for the occasional Hollywood oddball like Adolphe Menjou or Tom Selleck, theater people are pretty much all liberals or lefties of one kind or another, to the extent that they're political at all. Even Ronald Reagan was a liberal for most of his years as an actor. It goes with the territory. They're all liberals, yet they disagree. Therefore liberalism can't be the key variable. Or if it's the cause, it's also the cure.

ANOTHER REASON FOR SUPPOSing that the Equity decision reflects "liberal thinking" is that the decision supposedly favors the interests of actors of Asian descent—i.e., actors who are members of a racial minority that has historically been discriminated against. Liberals are traditionally on the side of the downtrodden. Q.E.D., right? Well, let's see. It is true that when a person of color complains that something he was entitled to has been unjustly appropriated by a white male, the visceral liberal reaction is to sympathize automatically with the person of color. It is equally true that the visceral conservative reaction is to sympathize automatically with the white male. But these reactions have nothing to do with "liberal thinking" or conservative thinking. They have nothing to do with thinking of any kind. They have to do with conditioned reflexes, to which thinking is the sole corrective. And when you think about the merits of this one, it's not even close.

BY NOW THE ARGUMENTS HAVE been thoroughly rehearsed, most eloquently by Frank Rich, the drama critic of *The New York Times*, who called the Equity decision "insupportable on every level." (Mr. Rich is a "liberal," by the way.) "This is a policy," Mr. Rich points out, "that if applied with an even hand would bar Laurence Olivier's Othello, Pearl Bailey's Dolly Levi, and the appearances of Morgan Freeman in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Denzel Washington in *Richard III* in Central Park this summer." Unlike the governing board of Actors' Equity, Mr. Rich has actually seen Jonathan Pryce's performance, which he describes as "electrifying," "brilliant," and "the artistic crux" of the show. Surely this should count for something. And even in its own debased terms, the Equity decision makes no sense. The character in question, a pimp-impresario called the Engineer and reminiscent of the Joel Grey character in *Cabaret*, is not an Asian. He is half-French and half-Vietnamese. Under the exquisite system of racial measurement employed by Actors' Equity, the actor selected for this role ought therefore to be fifty-fifty, too. Barring that, as Mr. Pryce told the *Times*, "you've got to drop down on one side of the fence or the other." An actor of purely British extraction, such as Mr. Pryce, has exactly as much "right" to play the part of someone who is half-French as an actor of purely Chinese extraction, such as B. D. Wong (whose complaint led to the Equity decision), has to play the part of someone who is half-Vietnamese. The equation is mathematically precise, right down to the incidental detail that the French historically dislike the British and the Vietnamese historically dislike the Chinese.

OF COURSE, ALL SUCH CALCULAtions are repugnant. Equity's position would be scarcely less dishonorable even if the Engineer were 100 percent Asian. The idea that you have to be something to play something traduces the whole meaning of acting, which is to make believe (and make the audience believe) you are someone you are not. Good actors can do this, which is the artistic rationale for the kind of non-traditional casting that has done so much to invigorate the theater of late. In England a few years ago, I'm told, some "conservative" critics actually boycotted a production of *Henry V* because a black man played the lead. The king was a white man, these critics pointed out, and Shakespeare intended the part to be played by one. This reasoning, which is not too different from Equity's, is a sort of demented theatrical version of the deplorable judicial doctrine of "original intent." If carried to its logical conclusion, it would require Juliet, Ophelia, and Lady Macbeth to be played by white men, too.

I HAVE TO ADMIT THAT ONE reason George Will's column got under my skin is that he is right about one uncomfortable fact: the particular type of racial posturing represented by the Equity decision takes place pretty much exclusively on the liberal left. But if the degeneration of part of the civil rights movement into what Mr. Will correctly calls a "racial spoils system" is a liberal problem, that is because the civil rights movement is, and always has been, a liberal movement. Conservatives are mostly immune to its follies because they are, and always have been, mostly indifferent to its ideals. That's why I wouldn't want to swap places.

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